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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

VOL. II

LONDON: G. BELL & SONS, LIMITED,
PORTUGAL STREET, KINGSWAY, W.C.
CAMBRIDGE: DEIGHTON, BELL & CO.
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN CO.
BOMBAY: A. H. WHEELER & CO.

# THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

(1579-1631)

BY

THOMAS SECCOMBE AND J. W. ALLEN

VOL. II

DRAMA

LONDON

G. BELL AND SONS, LTD.

1911

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1410 L Avenue

First edition, March, 1903.
Second edition, revised, 1904.
Third edition, 1905.
Fourth edition, 1909.
Fifth edition, revised, 1911.

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"As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to liue in *Pythagoras*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witnes his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.

"As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so *Shakespeare* among ye English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for Comedy, witnes his *Gētlemē of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loue labors lost*, his *Loue labours wonne*, his *Midsummers night dreame*, & his *Merchant of Venice*: for Tragedy his *Richard the* 2, *Richard the* 3, *Henry the* 4, *King Iohn*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo & Iuliet*. As *Epius Stolo* said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English."

*Palladis Tamia.* Wits Treasvry. Being the Second part of Wits Commonwealth. By Francis Meres Master of Artes at both Universities . . . At London, 1598, ff. 281-282.

"Il s'agit de cet énorme cycle shakespearien qui va de Marlowe à Otway, tourne comme une couronne de chefs-d'œuvre sauvages autour du front du poète d'*Hamlet*, et comprend tous ceux que les Anglais appellent les *Elizabethan Dramatists*. Ils forment une légion sordide et merveilleuse, ivres de faim, de vin, de passions formidables, de vie et de beauté, comme s'ils avaient découvert en même temps la même source sacrée par où la poésie s'échappa un instant des entrailles du globe. . . . Quels siècles et quels peuples nous offrent des trésors comparables à ceux-ci?—Mais c'est une mer si sombre, si farouche et si pleine de tempêtes que les derniers habitants de ses côtes osent à peine approcher de ses vagues prodigieuses dans le sein transparent desquelles tourbillonnent sans cesse toutes les pierreries et toutes les ordures."

Maeterlinck.

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|---|---|---|
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| Sackville and Norton: *Gorboduc* (*Ferrex and Porrex*) | 1562 | 1565 |
| *Gammer Gurton's Needle* | 1563? | 1575 |
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| | Acted | Printed |
|---|---|---|
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# THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE.

## BOOK III.

### DRAMA.

### CHAPTER I.

#### PRE-SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA.

§ 1. *Introductory.* § 2. *Lyly, Greene, Peele.*
§ 3. *Kyd; Marlowe.*

#### § 1. *Introductory.*

John Heywood, epigrammatist and writer of interludes, had been a favourite at the Courts of Henry VIII. and of Mary, and was probably alive at the beginning of our period. The interlude had been developed from the old morality play, in which the personages represented were not human beings, but qualities and abstractions. In the interludes of Heywood, Fancy and Folly, Sensual Appetite and the rest had given place to personages typical not of mere qualities, but of classes: the Pardoner, the Friar, the Poticary. In the early years of the reign of Elizabeth a great change had begun. Latin, Italian, French and Spanish plays were, as Greene said, thoroughly 'raked' to furnish the playhouses of London, even though the interlude still lingered in the country districts and before ruder

audiences. A new drama, foreign in its immediate origin, imitative and experimental, was springing up. Most of these early plays have perished: only the most ambitious and the most experimental of them, such as Edwardes' *Damon and Pythias* (1564-5) and Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1578) have survived. But very soon after 1579 there were signs that the exotic drama was about to be fully naturalized. Lyly's first comedy was produced before 1582; and in 1587-8, with the production of *Tamburlaine the Great*, the great age of our drama commenced.

Few events in our literary history, as the historian Green points out, are so startling as this sudden rise of the Elizabethan drama. The first public theatre was erected only in the middle of the Queen's reign. Before the close of it twelve theatres existed in London alone. Fifty dramatic poets, many of the first order, appear in the fifty years which precede the closing of the theatres by the Puritans; and great as is the number of their works which have perished, we still possess two or three hundred dramas, all written within this period, many of which belong to the world's literature.

How is this development to be accounted for? It is not a mere question of process. Apart altogether from the question as to how far Elizabethan drama developed from the old interludes and how far its origin was exotic, how are we to account for the fact that a people which in 1579 possessed in drama only the interlude and such academic or feeble imitations of foreign plays as those of Gascoigne and Whetstone, should within ten years have arrived at the starting point of a native drama so extraordinary in originality and strength?

It is difficult to say how far this can be referred to the national position of England at the time. Under Henry VII.

England had re-established its national government, under Henry VIII. it had for the first time fully realized its national unity and independence; it had, moreover, conquered and nationalized its Church. The struggle had been dangerous and painful, but the Elizabethan settlement of the Church had at length established a practical unity, peace and concord. England had successfully asserted its independence of any foreign prince or prelate. It had become self-conscious as never before, and proud of its past and its present. Its developing sea power gave it an increasing sense of security. Its freedom from internal strife enabled it to concentrate its energies upon expansion in all directions. In the monarchy the new-born self-conscious unity, the self-sufficing isolation of the people, was symbolized and all but worshipped. In the great Queen, always hesitating and never making a mistake, the people had found a sure guide, and the fruits of her care and patience were reaped in 1588. It is surely not without significance that the year of the Armada should exactly coincide with the rise of the star of Marlowe.

There is another aspect of the facts that is also worth noting. In the reign of Elizabeth England was just entering on her part in that great struggle among the European peoples for the dominion and exploitation of the outlying and recently discovered portions of the planet, which still continues. The foundations of the Empire were being laid by Drake and Hawkins in the Atlantic. Circumstances had compelled the English to look abroad, to look to America as well as to France and Spain. The mental horizon of Europe had been expanding for a century through the discovery of the world. Simultaneously had come the breaking up of the old forms of thought by the religious developments of the century. The air was full of speculation. With all this had come a new audacity of

mind, a sense of freedom and of power, which made itself felt in literature at once as a contempt for tradition and as a creative impulse.

The existence in the few larger towns, and above all in London, of an intelligent but non-reading population, eager for new things and for intellectual excitement, tended to concentrate the creative power of the time upon the stage. Into the capital came swarming a host of students from the universities burning to emulate the literary triumphs of ancient Greece and Rome, of modern Italy and France, of which translations were pouring from English presses. There were signs of a poetic literature already springing up. It was the desire of these aspirants to nationalize this poetic literature. For this purpose their art must appeal to the people, must be popular. The people left no doubt as to the side upon which their affections could be gained. Already in the seventies it was clearly seen that the stage, and the stage alone, furnished a field for the growth of a literature which was of its nature essentially popular while it admitted of the loftiest poetical aims. Men of talent—nay, of genius—soon began to respond to so splendid an opportunity. It was offered and taken just in time. The completion of the work which the Tudors had to perform led to the deliquescence of the old despotism, and this was followed at no long interval by the renewal of political strife. The growth of Puritanism was rapidly encroaching from another quarter upon this oasis of artistic detachment.

The more we study it the more clearly perhaps shall we discern the sharply-cut characteristics which fitted this one age of a small people in a small country to form the alembic of such a marvellous intellectual product as the drama of Shakespeare.

Divergent views are held as to the genesis of the Shake-

spearean drama in England. Some authorities maintain the continuity of the developed drama, as exemplified by a play such as *Hamlet*, with the old religious pageants of the Middle Ages. They maintain, in other words, that Miracle Plays passed through moralities into modern Romantic dramas.[1] But this view is completely traversed by another school of critics who hold the diametrically opposite opinion, namely, that the Modern Drama did not in any way arise out of the Miracle Plays, but out of the study and imitation of classical plays in schools and universities. In this view the early Moralities and Interludes stand in the same relation to the later Romantic Drama as the Fabulae Atellanae and the Etruscan mimes stood to the drama of ancient Rome. Roman Tragedy owed nothing to the Atellan Fables; Roman Comedy owed nothing to the Etruscan mimes. Both alike were exotics, and similarly the Elizabethan drama, on this view, is an exotic which, transplanted into English soil, developed thenceforth from its own root.

The truth lies between the extreme views—probably somewhat nearer that first stated. No one contends that the development of the Elizabethan drama was uninfluenced by external forces. The undeniable facts that the five-act form of drama was borrowed from Seneca and his Italian imitators, and that it was Italy which suggested the use of blank verse, would alone make such a contention absurd. But on the other hand, is Eliza-

[1] 'Miracles did not pass into morality plays; nor did moralities afterwards pass into dramas,' says Professor Henry Morley. On the contrary, says Professor Saintsbury, 'the Miracles *did* pass into the Moralities. The Moralities *did* pass into modern dramas.' The first view is upheld with great learning by Mr. Churton Collins. The contrary, with certain reservations, by Professor Courthope and Dr. A. W. Ward.

bethan drama a mere nationalized exotic? At least it must be admitted that it was into English soil that the exotic was transplanted. That soil had been prepared for its reception by the drama of Heywood and of Bale. Should we have naturalized the Italian drama if we had possessed none of our own? In that case we must have borrowed not merely a form, not merely an idea of drama, but drama itself. Assuredly this is not what happened. And during and after the borrowing process did not the tradition of the interlude persist? Is it asserted that the popular taste to which the interlude appealed, and which, therefore, it expressed, found no similar expression in our early comedy? There is, after all, no insuperable barrier between a diversion such as *The Four P's* and a farce with a moral such as *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Between Tragedy and Comedy there stands a species of drama peculiar to England and of immense popularity and importance in its bearing upon our native dramatic development. This is the native chronicle drama or history-play—a species to which Shakespeare himself devoted, roughly speaking, as much as a third part of his energies, and which is represented in the First Folio of his *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* by a complete section to itself. Now we can trace the evolution of this particular species with a precision which is impossible in the case of the early Comedy or Tragedy. We can see the Morality first tinctured with History and so becoming an Historical Morality, and then gradually shedding the Morality and assuming the features of the Chronicle History familiar to us in *King John* and *Richard III.*

In an Interlude like *Kyng Johan* of John Bale (d. 1563) the transition from the Morality to the History is clearly marked. In this play we have the abstractions of the Morality resolving themselves into historical characters

Thus Sedition becomes Stephen Langton; Private Wealth, Cardinal Pandulph; Usurped Power, Innocent III., and so on. It is only a step from *Kyng Johan* to *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (the rude model upon which Shakespeare worked), in which abstract characters and allegory altogether disappear, and a historical play, or scenic representation of History, in the Shakespearean sense becomes apparent.[1] We may fairly regard the English chronicle play as a natural development of the old interludes under strong foreign influences.

On the other hand, it is true that Italy gave us not merely a dramatic form, but a conception of drama that to us was practically new. From Italy we derived the idea of a drama dealing not with abstractions and ethics, but primarily and directly with men and women and all the actual joy and sorrow of life. It was a gift beyond price. It is extremely improbable that the English chronicle play would have developed as rapidly as it did had we been compelled to arrive at this conception unaided; while, in that case, the development of pure comedy and pure tragedy would have been still later. But the plays wherein we found the expression of this idea, and which we adapted or imitated, were comedies or tragedies; so that English comedy and tragedy actually precede the English chronicle play. Looked at on this side the early Elizabethan drama certainly has the appearance of an exotic. These adaptations and imitations owed nothing directly to the interlude, except perhaps an element of coarse farce. Yet it would be absurd to say that they owed nothing to the tradition of drama in England.

To develop fully the ways in which the changing conditions of Elizabethan audiences and Elizabethan stage-

[1] For a fuller development of this part of the subject, see Felix E. Schelling, *The English Historical Play*, N.Y., 1902.

craft worked with the influence of Seneca and his imitators upon the tradition of the interlude, would be to trace the evolution of the drama in England during the second and third quarters of the sixteenth century. This task is not for us; but at the same time it is necessary just to glance at the conflicting factors at work. By Henry VIII.'s time the old Miracle Plays and Pageants had been supplanted by the Moralities, formed upon the same structural models, but laying stress upon the allegory rather than the story, and describing the struggles of personified qualities, good and evil, surrounding the life of the typical man, rather than the incidents or personages of Holy Writ. In a shortened, condensed, and in other respects somewhat modified form, the Moralities were supplanted by the Moral Interludes,[1] which became the popular form of dramatic entertainment in the middle of the sixteenth century. The motive of these entertainments was still the conflict between good and evil, but the desire of amusing the spectators led the dramatist continually to make his allegorical personages more human. Thus in the Interludes, by way of varying the time-honoured horse-play, the 'old Vice' (cf. *Twelfth Night*, IV. ii. 134) was introduced in the capacity of an attendant upon the Devil. He was dressed as a clown, and was in a manner the forerunner of the Shakespearean clown as we see him in Touchstone and Feste.

The Moral Interludes.

The best results in this species of composition (the Interlude) are generally acknowledged to have been obtained by John Heywood, whose quaint and satirical dialogue

[1] The greater brevity of the Interlude is accounted for by the fact that these pieces occupied the pauses of the banquets ensuing upon the more substantial part of the repast. The name probably indicates merely a *ludus* between (*inter*) two or more players. It was applied generally to banqueting-hall (indoor) pieces.

between the Palmer, the Pardoner, the Poticary and the Pedlar in *The Four P's* is not only a masterpiece of farcical humour, but also an invaluable stepping-stone towards the drolleries of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1563), itself the precursor of such highly superior farces as *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

As an interlude in which drollery was in the ascendant came to be called a comedy, so a morality which exhibited more sternly the retribution for evil or the punishment of vice tended to develop into the tragi-comedy or 'lamentable tragedy, mixed full of pleasant mirth.' [1]

[1] Summed up, the dramatic movement from Interlude to Comedy may be thus recapitulated, in the words of Professor Courthope: 'The Morality, gradually dropping the didactic purpose and the allegorical form bequeathed to it by its old traditions, passed insensibly to the imitation of manners. . . . Heywood was the first to make the interest of the Interlude depend solely on the action of human personages. The study of the classics suggested to Udall and Still the manner in which the traditional features of the Morality might be blended with plots of the kind found in Plautus and Terence. Gascoigne began the refinement of the dialogue by his prose translation of Ariosto's comedy *I Suppositi*; while Lyly carried this improvement still further by enlivening prose dialogue with his Euphuistic wit. It remained for Shakespeare to take account of these opposite elements, and by his all-embracing genius to create out of them the Poetical Comedy.'

A parallel summary of the development of our Tragedy may be given in the words of Dr. Ward: 'Tragedy was derived from the mysteries and moralities through the transitional phase of the chronicle histories, with the immediate aid of the examples of Seneca and secondarily of his Italian imitators. Italian romance, but not this exclusively, suggested a wider variety of subjects of a cast dealing by preference with horrible and exciting events. These subjects were partly historical and political, partly domestic; and both kinds were seized upon by our early tragic dramatists. But our national history likewise continued to furnish subjects; and the Chronicle History remained a favourite species of dramatic composition.'

National as our drama undoubtedly was in its origin, its evolution from 1553 to 1588 was shaped mainly by foreign influences. It will be possible here merely to indicate the threefold character of these influences as derived: (1) from Plautus and the Latin comedy; (2) from Seneca; and (3) from the Romantic drama of the Italian Renaissance.

A certain number of features of the old vernacular drama, its rough knockabout farce, and the broad jocularity of 'Madge Mumblecrust,' 'Annot Alyface,' and 'Tibet Talkapace,' are wedded into our earliest titular English comedy. But classical influence is avowedly predominant in the play which Nicholas Udall wrote for his scholars at Westminster about 1552. In this comedy, called *Ralph Roister Doister*, first printed in 1567, with the addition of a conventional tag in honour of Queen Elizabeth, the two principal characters, Ralph, a pusillanimous, vain, and foolish braggart, and Matthew Merrygreek, a needy adventurer and parasite, are types directly borrowed from the Roman stage.[1]

Early Tragedy.

Ten years later the Italian estimate of Seneca as the Moses of dramatic art was echoed in the play of *Gorboduc*, played before the Queen at the Inner Temple in 1562, and remarkable not only as the first English tragedy (with plot, dialogue, and action of the modern as distinguished from the *Morality* type), but also from the fact that the authors, in their attempt to be completely faithful to their classical model, discarded the rhymed metre which had hitherto been the sole dramatic vehicle, and adopted in its place the new blank verse, which Surrey had just used for his translation of two Books of the *Aeneid*, and which seemed to

[1] The *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus.

them, as to him, to be the one way of reproducing the unrhymed measures of Greece and Rome.[1]

The way in which the Italian drama of the sixteenth century supplied the playwrights of England not only with plots, but also with a constructive model, is shown very clearly in the early and typical play, *The Supposes* of George Gascoigne, based upon *I Suppositi* of Ariosto, and acted at Gray's Inn in 1566. But similar examples abound. Gascoigne's tragedy of *Jocasta*, which was written in blank verse after the manner of *Gorboduc*, was based upon an Italian adaptation of the *Phœnissae* of Euripides by Ludovico Dolce. Robert Wilmot's tragedy of *Tancred and Gismunda*,[2] acted before the Queen at the Inner Temple in

[1] Seneca's *Tenne Tragedies* were successively translated into English by five scholars: Neville, Nuce, Studley, Jasper Heywood and Thomas Newton, and collected in a single volume by the last-mentioned in 1581. The Italians took Seneca as their favourite model, but they soon began to modify largely—to disregard the unities, to draw plots from contemporary history, and to mingle prose with verse, while, in order to obtain greater freedom, they began to drop rhyme in favour of blank verse (as in Trissino's *Sophonisba* of 1515).

It was mainly through the Italians that English playwrights derived the Senecan machinery of stage chorus, play within play, apparitions, and so on. Perhaps two-thirds of the plots of Elizabethan plays were taken from Italy. Our playwrights travelled in Italy; Gascoigne, Greene, Munday, Lodge, and Nash certainly, and possibly also Peele and Marlowe. For those at home, guides, grammars, dictionaries and translations abounded. It is not wonderful to find Ascham complaining that Petrarch was put above Moses and the *Decameron* more highly thought of than the *Bible*.

[2] In style and construction *Tancred and Gismunda* owed much to the Italian plays of Rucellai and Cammelli. Similarly from the Latin plays of Mussatus and Laudivio sprang the conception of those contrived by Legge and Gager, Alabaster and Ruggles; while to the tragedies of Cinthio and Mondella a considerable debt was doubtless owing from the sanguinary sensation

1568, was based upon the well-known story in Boccaccio which was simultaneously treated by several Italian dramatists. Ten years later George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, from which Shakespeare took the story of his *Measure for Measure*, was acted and printed, its plot being derived from a story which its author, Giraldi Cinthio, treated both in a novel and in a play. Henceforth the stories of the later Italian novelists, especially Bandello and Cinthio, came to be regarded by English playwrights as offering the best security attainable for the achievement of popular success. Two-thirds of the plots of Elizabethan plays were drawn from such sources. Occasionally the material was drawn direct from an untranslated Italian original; more often from a French translator or adapter such as Belleforest; oftener still from one of the Thesauri of Italian tales with quaint titles, which the enterprise of the London booksellers had put upon the English market. These books were the *Arabian Nights* of the sixteenth century.

Thus between 1560 and 1580 the influence of Italy was suggesting to English dramatists an ever wider range of choice in character and subject, was furnishing us with plots and models and hints of stage devices, refining dialogue and prompting the adoption of blank verse. The influence of Seneca did not go deep, and the unrhymed metre was mainly restricted to productions at Court and in the Inns of the Temple. But the Italian suggestion of romantic plots and five-act tragi-comedies was gradually producing the sort of comedy which appears clearly for the first time in the plays of Greene.

drama of Thomas Kyd and his school. *Jocasta* appeared in 1566. Gascoigne wrote Acts II., III., V., Francis Kinwelmershe the remainder. In some of the choruses Gascoigne uses Chaucer's seven-line stanza with fine effect.

At the same time, another influence of the greatest possible importance was in operation—a change, namely, in the condition of the theatre, by the growth of a class of habitual spectators and of professional performers.

The details of the transformation are, of course, not ascertainable; but it is clear that during the generation that preceded 1580, the permanent stage gradually discarded the homely properties of the movable platform; the nobleman's hall is superseded by the regular theatre, the servitor or schoolboy by the professional player, the morality comic or serious by comedy and tragedy, and the clerk or court poet who wrote interludes by the professional dramatist or playwright.

The old-fashioned moralities were played by roving companies, at first in open spaces, afterwards in the banqueting-halls of nobles. Early, however, in Henry VIII.'s reign, or even before 1509 in some cases, the great nobles began to attach permanent troupes of players (by origin choristers) to their households. In the early days of Elizabeth the principal companies of these trained actors were Lord Leicester's, Lord Warwick's, afterwards Lord Hunsdon's, and Lord Clinton's, afterwards known as the Earl of Sussex's men. In addition to the adult performers (all of whom were men) there were troupes of boy-actors, composed of the choirs of the Chapel Royal and St. Paul's. When not playing at Court or the houses of their patrons, these companies as a rule made use of inn yards, such as 'The Bell' and 'Cross-Keys' in Gracechurch Street, 'The Bull' in Bishopsgate, or 'The Belle Savage' on Ludgate Hill. Leicester's influence with the Queen enabled him in 1574 to procure for his 'servants' a royal patent empowering them to perform within the city of London and throughout the realm of England, provided that their plays were licensed by the Master of the Revels. But the company was to meet with strenuous opposition to the exercise of these privileges. The Corporation of London was the determined enemy of the stage, on the double ground of the immorality of many of the performers and their productions, and the peril

of contagion in time of plague. Accordingly in 1576 it issued an order that no theatrical performances should be given in public within the city bounds. This order led to a prolonged contest between the Corporation and the Privy Council, which had a highly important result. The players, relying on the favour of the Court, yet not daring openly to defy the authority of the Lord Mayor, established themselves in permanent buildings just beyond the boundaries of the city. Here they were outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation, and yet close enough to the town to permit of both the citizens and the Court gallants being present at their performances. The temporary structure in the inn yard now gave place to permanent buildings in the suburbs, such as the houses of Shoreditch ('The Theater' and 'The Curtain,' 1576-7), of Bankside, Southwark ('The Rose,' 1592, 'The Hope,' 'The Swan,' 'The Globe,' built 1599), and of Newington Butts; in addition to which there was 'The Blackfriars.' The stage passed from a nomadic to a settled condition.

Before the end of the century London was girdled with theatres, of which the most famous were 'The Fortune,' near Cripplegate, and 'The Globe.' In these playhouses a medley of influences, made up of the practice of the itinerant stage, the learning of the universities and the Inns of Court, the pictorial and scenic effects aimed at in the Court masks and pageants were focussed in a common centre. The audiences were composed of all classes, so that the dramatist had to take account of various and often conflicting tastes in the composition of his play.

The Theatres and their appurtenances.

As for the theatres themselves, the best of them were simple wooden buildings, round or hexagonal in shape. Some of the smaller theatres were roofed in, but the larger ones stood open to the air. The performances took place, roughly speaking, between two and five in the afternoon—in the summer, during which the companies travelled from town to town, probably rather later; but in the absence of long 'waits,' a five-act play and an afterpiece or 'jig' were easily compressed into two and a quarter hours, 'the two hours traffic of our stage.' A trumpet was blown thrice, and 'at the third sounding' the play began. A curtain, or 'traverse,' on an

iron rod at the back of the stage, was used for ambushes, concealments, or merely as an additional exit. Scenery was almost wholly lacking. Thus if a city or a forest had to be imagined by the audience, a signpost bore the name of Verona or Arden. The stage itself projected so far into the pit or courtyard that the actors were brought close to the spectators beneath and around them. At the back of the stage was an erection with doors right and left. The lower part of this formed a room for the accommodation of the actors. Above was a balcony or gallery. Distinguished visitors occasionally occupied this, but it was also used by the actors. On this balcony stood the citizens who held parley with King John and Philip Augustus. To this balcony was Antony drawn up. On it stood Juliet when she bade farewell to Romeo after her wedding night. Playgoers who could afford the luxury were accommodated with stools upon the stage; others might take boxes or rooms, just above the heads of the groundlings standing in the circular space of the yard. Prices varied from threepence, or less, for entrance only to about two shillings for the most expensive places in the best theatres. No actresses appeared upon the English boards, and all female parts were played by boys. Trained to the boards from childhood, the English actors were highly expert; the incidental songs and music were excellent—Italians alone could in those days compete with our native musicians; the dresses were choice and varied; the lack of scenery was compensated by an amplitude of action, supported by a luxuriance of diction, of poetry, and description on the part of the dramatist. The 'poet' in Ben Jonson's time got 'ten pound the play,' in addition sometimes to forty shillings for a dedication if the play were printed; but this was seldom done with the company's consent, so great was the fear of rival troupes getting hold of the text. As it was, a good stage-piece was often filched, either by means of stenographers sent to take down the play, or through the unscrupulous agency of impecunious actors. Occasionally, however, books of the play (small 'quartos') were sold in the theatre for a few pence.[1] Then as now people crowded to witness a

[1] Sooner or later quartos of all but the least successful plays

new play, especially when there was a chance of seeing in a new part such actors as Alleyn or Burbage, Will Kemp or Nat Field.[1] And while the players counted on the *bourgeoisie* for applause, they looked for a more discriminating approval from the nobles. The troupes were now noblemen's servants in name only, but many of the leading nobles were ardent connoisseurs of plays and acting, and courtiers of highest distinction (Southampton, Essex) contributed large sums to playhouse treasuries. The leading actors were profit-sharers, and, as will have been seen, they looked well after their business. There was indeed nothing amateurish about the Elizabethan stage. Marvellous as was the development of dramatic art between the accession of the play-loving Elizabeth and 1588, the progress towards perfection in the matter of stage-craft was fully commensurate with it.[2]

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were printed; a large trade was done in them, and already in James I.'s reign amateurs had begun to 'collect' them.

[1] Of the early actors it is important to observe that the most noted were low comedians or buffoons, such as Tarleton, Wilson and Kemp, most of whom were adepts at farcical improvisation. Aiming first and foremost at popular applause our early dramatists had of necessity to provide these popular favourites with suitable opportunities, which they often abused by introducing 'gag' of their own. Hence the strong and often exaggerated element of jigging and clownage in all our serious drama from *Faustus* even to *Lear*. (Cf. *Hamlet*, III. ii. For the larger question of how far the English public of the sixteenth century created the English Theatre, see Mézières, *Prédécesseurs et Contemporains de Shakespeare*, 3rd edit., 1881, 24-25).

[2] For full details on this interesting subject, see Nathan Drake's *Shakespeare and his Times*, 1817, vol. ii., chap. vii.; J. Payne Collier's *History of English Dramatic Poetry*, new edition, 1879; vol. i.: *Annals of the Stage*, down to the Puritan Revolution; vol. ii.: the Drama from the miracle-plays of the thirteenth century down to Marlowe and Greene; vol. iii.: Lyly, Peele, Kyd, Lodge, Nash, etc.; the old theatres and their appurtenances; and memoirs of the principal actors in Shakespeare's plays. See also Dr Ward's *English Dramatic Literature*, 1899, chap. iii.; J. A. Symonds's

The Drama (1558-1588).

The time was one of daring expansion and of vehement utterance. The Englishman had thrown off his old insularity and was looking outwards into the world, and his vision was not yet blurred and narrowed by Puritanism. The national genius was craving for popular literary expression. The overwhelming popularity of the stage pointed superior minds to the conquest of the Drama, the empire of which had hitherto been swayed either by frigid pedants or by laureates of the inn-yard and the market-square. The conflict seemed to lie between the popular drama, which was not literary, and the literary drama, which was not popular. As a whole, the playgoers with the Queen at their head were demanding situation-plays with ingenious devices from Italian novels, spiced with plenty of native English wit and with a large element of jigging and clownage. Of the vast majority of plays produced under these influences before 1588 we know little or nothing. The names of some of them have survived, but most of them have perished utterly. The playwright of that time did not mind mixing tragedy with comedy, prose with verse, town with country, kings with clowns. He set at naught the unities of classical and Aristotelian tradition. Sidney and his scholarly friends laughed at the absurdities of the popular theatre. They eschewed rhyme and hoped to be able to bring hexameter into general use. They sighed after developments upon Senecan lines, and wished to have tragedy, comedy, and pastoral carefully discriminated with a due observance of the unities of time and place—such a development, in fact, as led in France to the declamatory drama of Racine. The bulk of the playgoing public cared

*Shakespeare's Predecessors*, 1884; Henry Morley's *English Writers*, vol. viii.; F. G. Fleay's *Chronicle History of the London Stage* (1559-1642), 1890. See NOTE, p. 53.

for none of these things. They preferred the rhyme of *King Cambises* to the blank verse of *Gorboduc*. They liked their playwrights to leap lightly over great intervals of time and space, and thought themselves 'ill provided if they were not taken within the space of two hours from Genesis to the Day of Judgement.' The public, indeed, were ready to follow a dramatic author of vigorous imagination wherever he desired to lead them. These were the circumstances in which great leaders and innovators responded to the nation's literary need, and in which during the years between 1579 and 1589 strides of the greatest significance were made. In choosing great subjects for tragic treatment, in sustaining and developing the dramatic reproduction of important historical themes, in claiming for passion its right of adequate expression, in essaying however tentatively the art of dramatic characterization, Kyd and Peele, but beyond and above them Marlowe, not only gave our drama to literature, but encouraged it definitely to emulate the achievements of that drama which had conferred such a lustre upon the ancient world. For comedy, by facilitating freedom and elegance of form, a service of scarcely less magnitude was performed by Lyly and Greene: by Lyly in polishing dialogue and adapting mythological machinery, by Greene in harvesting the rich store of national folk-lore and ballad to dramatic purpose.

## § 2. *Lyly, Greene, Peele.*

The first of this notable band of whom we shall treat is John Lyly,[1] who came up to Court in 1578

[1] For Lyly's life see i., p. 114. Cf. Lyly's *Endymion*, ed. G. P. Baker, New York, 1894; Lyly's *Dramatic Works*, ed. F. W. Fairholt, 2 vols., 1858; and *Works*, ed. Warwick Bond, 3 vols., 1902; *John Lyly*, by Albert Feuillerat, 1910.

and acted for many years as an informal assistant to the Master of the Revels.

John Lyly (1553-1606).

The comedies of Lyly were for the most part acted in the eighties and printed in the nineties of the sixteenth century. The best of them were collected by Edward Blount in 1632, under the title of *Sixe Court Comedies*, this collection including (in the probable order of acting) *Alexander, Campaspe and Diogenes*—*Sapho and Phao*—*Gallathea*—*Endimion*—*Midas*, and *Mother Bombie*. Besides these he wrote *Love's Metamorphosis* (first printed in 1601); and *The Woman in the Moone*, acted probably about 1593, printed in 1597—another pastoral, with an allegorical foundation, but singular among Lyly's plays as being written, not in prose but in very tolerable blank verse. Gascoigne's *Supposes* of 1566 had already been written in prose, and so had a considerable part of *The Famous Victories of Henry V.*; but Lyly was the first to write dramatic prose which was at once enjoyable and effective.

In Lyly's court comedies, the first of which can hardly have appeared later than 1581-2, there is no trace of the didactic tradition or of the crude popular methods of the interlude. His work is remarkable for its originality of form[1] and refinement of manner. His plays were acted at Court, and he was there able to gratify to the full his taste for erudite allusion and for curiosities of over-expression. Dramatic or human interest in his comedies there is practically none: he makes no appeal to emotion and hardly attempts characterization. His plays are comedies of pure dialogue, depending for attractiveness on verbal fence, pleasant allusion, antithesis, pun, conceit, and simile; to which, in the case of *Sapho*, *Endimion*, and *Midas*, must be added Court allegory. They are puppet shows, literary

[1] The nearest approach to Lylyan comedy before Lyly was in Rich. Edwardes' *Damon and Pythias*, 1564.

toys, trivially though gracefully fantastic, witty, and frigid. In the midst of his quips[1] and similes he inserts witty and pleasant little lyrics. The charming song, in quatorzain,

> 'Cupid and my Campaspe played
> At cards for kisses . . .'

is Lyly at his best, and could not have been bettered in its way by Campion or Herrick.[2]

Elaborate and extravagant compliment to the Queen is often inserted, and the following dialogue from the allegorical *Endimion* (printed in 1591) is fairly typical of his manner. Tellus (Mary, Queen of Scots), who is jealous, asks Endimion (James VI of Scotland) if it be Cynthia (the Queen) with whom he is so desperately enamoured:

'*Endimion.* You know, Tel'us, that of the gods we are forbidden to dispute, because their deities come not within the compasse of our reasons; and of Cynthia we are allowed not to talke but to wonder, because her vertues are not within the reach of our capacities.

*Tellus.* Why, she is but a woman.

*End.* No more was Venus.

*Tellus.* She is but a Virgin.

*End.* No more was Vesta.

*Tellus.* She shall have an end.

*End.* So shall the world.

*Tellus.* Is not her beautie subject to time.

*End.* No more than time is to standing still.

*Tellus.* Wilt thou make her immortall?

*End.* No, but incomparable.'

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[1] He himself defines the quip as 'a short saying of a sharpe wit, with a bitter sense in a sweet word.' The lyrics were brought in for his choristers at St. Paul's whom he trained for the stage.

[2] *Campaspe*, played before the Queen on Twelfth Day by her Majesty's children and the children of Paule's, in 1582, printed in 1584. It may have been given at Blackfriars, 1581. Cf. Gayley's *Represent. English Comedies*, 1903, 277. The lyrics may not have been Lyly's. They are not in the quartos.

It is just because they are so purely literary that Lyly's comedies are interesting and important in the history of English drama. Topical pastimes rather than plays, they are mere sketches. They will not stand dramatic anatomy; but they have the form of true comedy, if not its substance. Lyly was the first to write prose comedy in England; he was also the first to write comedy purged of all appeal to the gross popular taste, clear of all old English tradition and depending on aesthetic and intellectual qualities alone.

It is significant of Lyly's influence that Shakespeare should have studied and found him suggestive. A taste for word fence and quibble was natural to Shakespeare; yet, if Lyly had not written, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* would hardly have been as euphuistic as they are. And there are more positive signs that the great man took hints from Lyly's comedies, as he did from his *Euphues*. The bragging and pedantic warrior, Sir Tophas, of *Endimion*, is evidently the prototype of Don Armado, and the burlesque constable in the same play reminds us of Dull and of Dogberry. Again the song of the fairies about *Endimion*,

'Pinch him, pinch him black and blue,'

may have suggested the fate of Falstaff at the tryst of Herne the Hunter (though the idea, of course, is traditional).

Lyly's plots are of the utmost artificiality. That of his third play, *Gallathea*,[1] is typical. Neptune, enraged at the destruction by Danes of a temple, inundates Lincolnshire, and only consents to withdraw his waters on condition that the fairest and chastest maid of the land be offered in quinquennial sacrifice. Tityrus dresses his

[1] It and its two predecessors are typical respectively of Lyly's historical, mythological and pastoral comedy; *Campaspe* deriving from Pliny (*Nat. Hist.*), *Sapho* from Ovid (*Heroid.*, xv.), and *Gallathea* from Ovid (*Metamorph.*, iv.).

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lovely daughter Gallathea in male attire in order that she may escape a horrible fate, while Meliboeus, another shepherd, takes a similar precaution with his daughter Phillida. The two girls encounter each other in the woods, and fall in love, each supposing the other to be a youth. The ever-mischievous Cupid excites ardent passions for the two disguised damsels among the Nymphs of Diana, who retaliate by seizing and binding the little god. In the meantime Neptune is disgusted at the virgin, named Hebe, who is offered up to propitiate him, and refuses to accept her. While a fairer is being sought, Venus complains to Neptune of Cupid's wrongs, and Neptune, finally, to mollify the attendants of Diana, the protectress of virgins, consents to forego his maiden tribute on condition of Cupid's immediate release. Gallathea and Phillida have grown so fond of each other that Venus decides to change the sex of one of them; the delicate question 'which' she leaves to be decided at the church door, and upon this the play ends.

The last play of the eight that we can safely ascribe to Lyly, following *Midas* and *Mother Bombie* (printed 1594), is 'a wittie and courtly Pastorall' called *Love's Metamorphosis*. The plot is of the usual Watteau-like artificiality, and the frigidity of the dialogue is greater than usual, which may be due to the oncoming and disillusionizing old age of the author, who is generally supposed to have died in 1606.

Robert Greene (1560-1592).

Robert Greene was born at Norwich about 1560, graduated at Cambridge (St. John's) in 1579, and then, according to his own account, went abroad. After some roystering and dissolute adventures in France and Spain, he returned to England about 1580. Five years later he married, but after spending the marriage portion left wife and child and settled in London. There he was joined by his friend Thomas Nash, and supported himself by his flowing pen

until his final or deathbed 'repentance' in August, 1592. He died on 3rd September, and was buried 'in the New Churchyard, by Bethlehem Hospital.' In later life he accused himself of a great variety of crimes; but his works are singularly free from immorality or grossness, and in the absence of better evidence, we may well doubt if Greene was a man of inherently vicious character, and not merely an easily led and reckless pleasure-seeker of notoriously irregular life. Except that he possessed a lyric gift of a high order, his resemblance to Villon may be taken to be very slight.

Whether his normal dwelling-place were actually within the borders of Alsatia or no, Greene's gift for literature was remarkable: his faculty for spontaneous production both in prose and verse was brilliant, and spasmodic and fragmentary though his literary output may be, we cannot fail to regard him with interest as one of the men of genius of exuberant vigour and vitality who straightened the way for the great romantic movement in Elizabethan England.

Greene's fame chiefly rests, or at least deserves to rest, upon the lyrics that are scattered through his romances. Of his numerous novelettes and tracts two have gained an adventitious distinction: upon one of them, *Pandosto* (1588). Shakespeare founded *The Winter's Tale*, and the other, *A Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592), contains an attack upon Shakespeare under the contumelious nickname of Shakescene, dictated by a spirit of envy like that which Greene had displayed towards Marlowe in his *Perimedes* of 1588, when he spoke with disdain of what Nash called the 'drumming decasyllabon' of blank verse.[1]

Of his plays, with which we are here concerned, five

[1] For his prose works as a whole see Bk. II., vol. i., p. 120.

have come down to us, and in addition to these five,[1] which are conjectured to have been produced between 1587 and 1591, he collaborated with Thomas Lodge in *A Looking-Glass for London and England* (1594, 4to), and very likely had some share in the trilogy which went to the making of Shakespeare's *Henry VI.* Two of Greene's plays are worthy of special attention. The first of these, *The Honourable Historie of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, was probably produced in emulation of Marlowe's *Faustus*. Both plays deal with the very ancient fable (to go back no farther than Simon Magus) of a compact made by a man with the Evil One, Marlowe basing his play upon the German *Faust-book* of 1587, Greene upon a prose tract (of which no early copy is known)[2] dealing with the legendary history of Friar Bacon (*i.e.*, Roger Bacon of Oxford), his magic crystal, his brazen head, and scheme for encircling England with a wall of brass. If we conclude that *Faustus* was written in the autumn of 1588, we may safely assume that *Friar Bacon* was produced about six months later. There is, however, no question of imitation, the two plays being worked out on entirely different lines. Marlowe's play looks forward to the terror that Shakespeare inspired in *Macbeth*;

[1] (1) *Historie of Orlando Furioso*, based on Ariosto (xxiii.), printed 1594, 4to; (2) *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, 1594, 4to; (3) *The Scottish Historie of James IVth. Slain at Flodden*, based on a tale of Cinthio's with a curious chorus-prelude, introduced by 'Oberon king of the Fairies,' and some comic scenes in which figures the excellent clown 'Slipper,' 1598, 4to; (4) *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, a dreary imitation of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, 1599, 4to; (5) *A pleasant conceyted Comedie of George a Greene*, 1599, 4to. All these, as will be observed, were printed only after the author's death.

[2] *The Famous Historie of frier Bacon: containing the wonderful things that he did in his life: also the Manner of his death, with the Lives and the Deaths of the two Coujurers, Bungye and Vandermast* (*ap.* Thoms, *Early Prose Romances*).

Greene's looks backward to the old morality, with its well-worn buffooneries. It is one of the last pieces in which the devil appeared *in propria persona* upon the London stage, and the magical incidents are all described, not only without the least semblance of a shudder, but with the greatest possible joviality and gusto.[1] Upon the original legend Greene engrafts the charming love-idyll of Prince Edward and the fair Peggy of Fressingfield, 'fresh with the sparkling dew of the meadows.' There is nothing sombre in the action even where it takes us into the Friar's cell. As compared with Marlowe's *Faustus*, like a tropical thunder-storm, intense, brief, and unrelieved, Greene's play has all the leisurely beauty of an English summer day.[2]

Apart from the pedantic classical similes, which he may have felt compelled to introduce in rivalry with the classical manner of Marlowe, and which come most absurdly from the lips of a dairymaid, *Friar Bacon* is singularly free from the irritating and contemptuous lack of finish which disfigures much of Greene's work. An extravaganza, in which fun and fancy are blended with excellent effect, it is not only agreeable to read, but with slight alteration might well be played as a Christmas piece at the present day.

In *George a Greene* he turns with the like happy result to another old English legend, that of the Pinner[3] of Wakefield, his merry encounters with Robin Hood and others. This piece, in which the rustic hero, an honest

[1] Bacon's comic servant, Miles (unmistakeably heir of 'the old Vice'), rides off cheerily on the Devil's back, having previously put on spurs in order to keep his mount in good going; he expresses his intention of turning tapster in hell, which he conceives to be an exceptionally 'dry' place.

[2] Cf. Prof. J. M. Brown's *An Early Rival of Shakespeare*.

[3] Pinner or Pinder = keeper of the pinfold or pound for strayed cattle.

yeoman, after buffeting all and sundry, bluntly declines the proffered honour of knighthood—

> 'Then let me live and die a yeoman still.
> So was my father, so must live his son;
> For 'tis more credit to men of base degree
> To do great deeds than men of dignity.
> *King Edward.* Well, be it so, George.'

was evidently addressed to the groundlings, with whom it must have been no small favourite; but its pictures of homely English life in the country are perhaps the best things of the kind before Shakespeare, and the greater freedom of the blank verse, which often ends with an unstressed syllable, shows that Greene was already developing a freer use of the metre which he formerly disdained.

What is best and most characteristic in the plays of Greene is the poetry of his pastoral landscape and his representation of the characters of women; in both of these respects he exercised an unmistakable influence on the genius of Shakespeare. Like our early masters of the novel, he clings to one type of feminine ideal, the virtuous and long-suffering wife, somewhat pale and monotonous, but still a prototype of Desdemona, Imogen and Hermione. In freeing the verse of the stage from pedantry and overloaded diction, Greene helped, as Dr. Ward says, to wing the feet of the English dramatic muse; and there is yet another point in which Greene has a remarkable affinity—greater than that of his more original contemporaries—with his mighty successor: 'His best plays breathe a thoroughly national spirit, and they are instinct with love of English traditions, English virtues, and English familiar scenes.'

George Peele was the son of a clerk of Christ's Hospital, and was educated at that school, whence he proceeded

George Peele (1558-1597).

to Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford. He migrated, however, and graduated B.A. from Christ Church in 1577. Four years later he left Oxford for London, and at first turned his graceful pen to the production of literary tributes and compliments in return for stipulated fees. This source of income running dry, he abandoned himself, despite the warnings of his friend Greene, to write for the common players. He resembled Greene in some respects, and Greene wrote of him in his *Groatsworth* as a fellow-sinner. His life does not appear to have been in any sense a counterpart of his sweet and innocuous poetry. He was often put to humorous shifts for the bare means of subsistence, and he died distressfully in or about 1597. Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598) ascribes a disgraceful death to him. Some eight years afterwards his notoriety suggested a label for a compilation of extravagant practical jokes (in some of which a suspicious likeness may be detected to anecdotes of François Villon), which was styled *Merrie conceited Jests: of George Peele Gentleman, sometime a Student in Oxford.* A pastoral play by Peele, *The Arraygnement of Paris,* was published in 1584. The idea of the play is the trial of Paris for error of judgement in giving the apple to Venus. Composed for the delectation of the Court, it contended that in merit the ball belonged to one Eliza, who ruled over (says Diana)

> 'A kingdom that may well compare with mine,
> An auncient seat of kings, a second Troy
> Y-compassed round with a commodious sea.'

Blank verse (that has more music in it than the extreme monotony of the cadences would lead us to expect) is occasionally used; more often rhymed metre which has a sound sweet and caressing, but withal as monotonous as 'the

plashing of fountains.' The shepherd interlude in the third act, in which parts are borne by Colin, Hobbinol, and Oenone, was evidently a reminiscence of *The Shepheardes Calendar*. This contains the beautiful song:

> 'Fair and fair, and twice so fair,
> And fair as any may be,
> The fairest shepherd on our green,
> A love for any ladye.'

One other pastoral play, at least, by Peele is lost to us, and it is not until about 1590 that we have his attempt at a chronicle history in *Edward I.* (printed 1593), a very indifferent production, which libels good Queen Eleanor in order to conciliate the anti-Spanish humour of the years immediately following the Armada.

Another tiresome, windy, bombastical play, *The Battell of Alcazar*, which recalls some of Marlowe's characteristic faults, without the redeeming virtues, is referred to 1592; it was printed in 1594.

Peele's next play, *The Old Wives' Tale*, was printed in 1595. This curious medley, in which Antic, Frolic, and Fantastic are three of the *personae*, has much of the old-fashioned interlude about it; it is for the most part in prose, but is enlivened by some very quaint catches of song, and its high spirits carry off a good deal of boisterous nonsense.[1] The last play of Peele's of which we need speak is *David and Bethsabe*, which was printed in 1599, but of which the date of composition is unknown. The fable is based upon the Old Testament story of David, as

[1] It seems to have furnished Milton with some hints for his *Comus*, Peele's Sacrapant and Delia being the originals of the Comus and Lady of Milton. A clown called Huanebango emits some very funny 'Dub-dub-a-dub' hexameters by way of chaffing the pedantic Gabriel Harvey.

related in the Second Book of Samuel, without expurgation of any kind. Peele may have resorted to the Bible in order to disarm the prejudices of the serious public of those days. The subject gave a fine scope to his very considerable gift for local colour. Some of the early speeches of David are full of mellifluous imagery:

> 'Now comes my lover tripping like the roe,
> And brings my longings tangled in her hair.
> To joy her love I'll build a kingly bower,
> *Seated in hearing of a hundred streams. . . .*'

The cloying sweetness of Peele's phraseology tends to monotony, but he breaks away from this with striking effect now and again, as in the lurid death-scene of Absalon. In constructive power he was deficient, although he is believed at one time to have found employment upon the stage as a player.

Peele imparted a certain luxuriant variety to his blank verse, though his sweetness is effeminate, and his prettiness too often affected. Take, for instance, David's description of Bethsabe:

> 'Fairer than Isaac's lover at the well,
> Brighter than inside-bark of new-hewn cedar,
> Sweeter than flames of fine-perfumèd myrrh,
> And comelier than the silver clouds that dance
> On Zephyr's wings before the King of Heaven.'

Both in his smooth versification and in his treatment of religious themes a resemblance may often be traced to the manner of Clément Marot, whose *Psaumes* were published in 1541-3. The honeyed cadences of Peele's verse may have to some slight extent influenced the early manner of Shakespeare; but upon the whole Peele had

little power of origination, and he contributed much less to dramatic progress in England than Lyly, Greene, or Marlowe.[1]

### § 3. *Kyd; Marlowe.*

Thomas Kyd (1558-1595).

Thomas Kyd, the son of Francis Kyd, a scrivener, was baptized at St. Mary Woolnoth's, in Lombard Street, on November 6th, 1558. He was sent to Merchant Taylors' under Mulcaster and educated above his profession of scrivener, which he soon deserted for literature. His accession to the ranks of professional writers, as usual, excited some jealousy, and Nash wrote in his preface to Greene's *Menaphon* of those who, leaving the trade of *Noverint* whereto they were born, busy themselves with the endeavours of art, pose as English Senecas, attempt Italian translations or twopenny pamphlets, and botch up a blank verse with ifs and ands. Of all these offences Kyd was guilty, although his blank verse is undeserving of such summary condemnation, and marks an advance on earlier efforts. But it was as a tragedian of blood that 'sporting Kyd,' as he was ironically called, achieved his widespread fame. In 1587-8 he produced a play before which the popularity of even Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* paled. It was called *The Spanish Tragedie* (or 'the pitiful death of old Hieronymo'), and was licensed in 1592; but the first extant edition is dated 1594, while another edition appeared in 1604 with extensive additions at the hand of Ben

[1] Peele's plays have been finely edited by A. Dyce and by Mr. A. H. Bullen. The divergence of two such excellent critics is noteworthy. The former accords enthusiastic praise to *David and Bethsabe*; the latter condemns it as 'a mess of cloying sweets.' The best passages in this play are cited with warm approbation in *Retrospective Review*, i. (1820), 349-357. All that is of most worth in Peele is contained in the thin volume (52) of Routledge's Shilling Universal Library.

Jonson.[1] Like *Titus Andronicus*, *The Spanish Tragedie* was a tale of horrors, in what we should now call Transpontine taste, and although it excited the enthusiasm of the vulgar, it was derided by the more cultured of its critics. The wits were fond of parodying it, and the strange soliloquy of the hero, 'Beware Ieronymo, go by, go by,' became a regular catchword of the period. A similar expression greatly in request among theatre-goers was 'Hamlet, Revenge!' the quotation being from a pre-Shakespearean play on the subject of the Prince of Denmark. It has been suggested that Kyd may have written this early *Hamlet*, which is commonly referred to 1587-8.[2] It is to be noted that there is a Ghost in the Induction to Kyd's *Tragedie*, and that the revenge is effected by means of the device of a play within a play. For, like *Hamlet*, *The Spanish Tragedie* represents an action of cruel and cold-blooded murder followed by a long-meditated and sanguinary revenge. Upon the same grounds it resembles Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, in emulation of which play Professor Courthope thinks it was probably written. Marlowe provides plenty of precedents for rant and bloodshed. The machinery, the figure of Necessity and a ghost, and not a few of the 'sententious tags' Kyd borrows

[1] There is also extant a crude, formless, and very hastily written Proem to *The Spanish Tragedie*, dated 1605, and entitled *The First Part of Ieronimo*. The complete failure to dovetail with *The Spanish Tragedie* would almost suggest that it was not a genuine play-book at all, but an enterprising bookseller's venture, written by a very incompetent poet after a single visit to the theatre.

[2] The conjecture that Kyd was the author of the original *Hamlet* is based upon the fact that Nash in his attack upon Kyd in the prefatory Epistle to *Menaphon*, makes the significant gibe that our 'English Seneca' if entreated could furnish 'whole *Hamlets* I should say handfulls of tragical speeches.' See the valuable edition of Kyd by Fred. S. Boas, 1901.

from Seneca—'English Seneca read by candle-light,' Nash calls him. Kyd had a keen eye for dramatic situation. His play is a blood-curdling melodrama, illustrating the vulgar doctrine of 'Murder will out'; but it is not deficient in either constructive or imaginative power, and, rhetorical as the verse is, there is a haunting emphasis and iteration about it which renders it highly effective for the purpose of rant. As might be expected, its imitators were many—among them the authors of *Titus Andronicus*, *Hoffmann*, and *A Warning for Faire Women* (1599). Hieronimo went all round the country in a ballad, and his success at home was fully equalled abroad in Dutch and German adaptation.[1]

The sensationalism chargeable to Kyd is also chargeable in a less degree to Kyd's far greater associate, Kit Marlowe. The Marlowesque drama is not exceedingly refined. There is a taint of extravagance about it. It lacks the complexity and the profundity of life that were coming, and still more the humour, the polish, the winsomeness and charm of Shakespearean comedy. To produce an effect Marlowe drives kings in a team and decimates mankind; in Shakespeare a handkerchief is dropped and a greater effect is produced. Yet, when all is said, there is a power and a magnificence about Marlowe that is irresistible, and clearly marks him out for what he is—one of the literary pioneers, and great literary athletes of our race. Whether it be mainly in the roll of his verse or the march of his mind, there is about his work a certain elemental force and simplicity of genius which spontaneously finds great words for the expression of great emotions. With his melodious and intoxicating spon-

[1] For contemporary references see *Taming of the Shrew*, Induct., 10; *King John*, II. i. 137; 3 *Henry VI.*, V. vi. 66; *Every Man in his Humour*, I. i.; *Alchemist*, IV. iv.

taneity, with his radiant joy in the unattainable, he combines an instinctive and enthusiastic love for fine literature. In the bede-roll of English poets he was the first after Spenser to perceive the beauty of *words*. He knows much more about literature than about life. He is as much of an idealist as Shelley; in love with beauty and chanting and sound; but without Shelley's unfortunate desire to probe the problems of human existence. He directs his rodomontade not against priests and kings, but rather in praise of gigantic personalities, whose potent wills and Titanic passions elevate them to the sphere of demigods. In his exaltation of power and dominion he responded to the new-born imperialism of his fellow-countrymen—their triumph over the twin giants of evil and oppression, as they regarded the Pope and Philip, their devotion to their Queen, their vision of boundless possibilities in the new world of the far west, their confidence in their island race, their firm belief in the great destiny of their country.

Like all great work which involves rude severance with literary tendencies of old standing, Marlowe's early drama is characterized by qualities of violence and excess. It has the defects of the revolutionary spirit.

It is lacking in wit, in humour, in pathos, and in grace. It has not the wit of Lyly, the prettiness of Peele, or the humour and pathos that are occasionally united in Greene. What Marlowe had was the intensity of genius, the fierce originality of the innovator, a resonance of sound and a command of language which can affect us as powerfully after the lapse of three hundred years as when the poet wrote.

No less important from a purely literary point of view is Marlowe's position as instaurator of popular blank-verse tragedy in England. The first to address the great public in blank-verse measure, he did so, as appears in the

Prologue to *Tamburlaine*, in express contempt for the 'jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,' seeking deliberately for emphasis by means of 'high astounding terms.'

Interesting as they are in many respects, appreciation of Lyly, of Peele, of Kyd, and even of Greene, will always be confined to the curious. Their works are not very accessible, and their readers are necessarily few. In the main, to the student of the greatest Elizabethan drama, they show what that drama lacked at the advent of Marlowe, to whom they serve as admirable foils. Marlowe, on the other hand, stands out with increasing clearness as a great determining force in our literary history at a most critical epoch. As has been said of the period 1578-87, the literary drama was not popular, and the popular drama not literary. The literary and academic school employed as their medium a wooden and pedantic blank verse, while the popular playwrights oscillated between prose and rhymed couplets. Marlowe came, and, by the infusion of passion into his work and the introduction of his 'mighty line,' transformed the chaotic medley of popular drama into the nucleus of a superb literature.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593).

Of Marlowe's life and character scarcely anything is known—the sum total forms but a small fraction of the knowledge we possess of Shakespeare. Christopher Marlowe, the son of John Marlowe, a shoemaker of Canterbury, was born in that city early in 1564 (two months before Shakespeare), and was educated at the King's School, Canterbury. He proceeded to Corpus Christi (Benet) College, Cambridge, where he manifested a strong taste for the classics, but no special aptitude for classical scholarship, if we may judge by his version of Ovid's *Amores* made about this time. Having graduated B.A. in 1583, he soon after-

[1] Printed 1597-8. See Bk. I., vol. i., 90.

wards removed to London, where he attached himself as a dramatist to the theatrical company of the Lord Admiral, the Earl of Nottingham. During the four years, 1587-90, Marlowe produced his four great tragic masterpieces, *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II.* His two remaining plays, *The Massacre at Paris* (depicting Guise and Catherine de Medicis) and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (a juvenile composition completed by Nash), are preserved in a very unsatisfactory state, and give us the impression of being quite unworthy of his genius. The exquisite fragment (two sestiads) of *Hero and Leander* was entered in the Stationers' Books in September, 1593, but was not actually published until 1598.[1] On the threshold of a career that promised great glory to the literature of his native land, Marlowe was killed at Deptford, aged only twenty-nine. In the register of the parish church of St. Nicholas appears this entry: 'Christopher Marlow slain by Francis Archer 1 June 1593.' Five years later, in his *Palladis Tamia*, Francis Meres wrote: 'As the poet Lycophron was shot to death by a certain rival of his, so Christopher Marlowe was stabd to death by a bawdy serving man, a rival of his in his lewd love.' Marlowe was in all probability a fiery young man, like his raptures, 'all ayre and fire,' and there is no reason for supposing that any special discredit attaches to his share in the affray that so unhappily proved fatal. As against the fact that (in common with the majority of the playwrights of his time and of young men about town from that day to this) he sowed his wild oats wildly, we have to set the circumstances that, though a man of humble origin, he retained the esteem of such sterling men as Chapman and Raleigh, Sir Roger Manwood and Sir Thomas Francis

[1] Among his fellows Marlowe's reputation as a poet rested mainly upon *Hero and Leander*, and his solitary yet famous lyric, *Come live with me.*

Walsingham. What then was the reason for the invariable shake of the head with which the name of 'poor Marlowe' came to be mentioned by his contemporaries. Investigation has only quite recently afforded us the solution. The reason was that at the time of Marlowe's death it was being whispered all over London that he was a most dangerous atheist—a synonym in the increasingly Puritan mind of the nation for a devil incarnate.

In the loose talk of the Elizabethans, anti-trinitarian opinions, 'horrible' blasphemy and atheism were practically indistinguishable; and it is now known that Marlowe's atheism was his enemies' opprobrious synonym for heterodox views, often, no doubt, loosely and indiscreetly expressed. The extravagant utterance of some of his views, when 'under the shadow of the vine,' probably led to the interest which we know that in 1593 (or the last year of the poet's life) the Privy Council had begun to manifest in the opinions of Marlowe and his coterie. In their anxiety to stamp out blasphemy, the Council seized one of Marlowe's intimates, Thomas Kyd, the dramatist, and prepared to lay hands upon the more prominent offender. A few days before the brawl in which Marlowe met his death they succeeded in discovering among Kyd's papers 'some vile heretical conceiptes,' denying the Deity of Jesus Christ, which the prisoner affirmed that he had from Marlowe. The latter seems, in effect, to have shared the Unitarian views for which a graduate of Cambridge, Francis Kett, had been burnt to death at Norwich in 1589. He defended his views (to which he may very likely have given expression in writing) in a serious and methodical argument. It is but too likely that if he had survived that fatal 1st of June it would have gone hardly with the dramatist. Kyd, who remained under the ban of the Privy Council, managed to transfer to his deceased friend the

chief responsibility for his 'blasphemous' opinions; the unfortunate man was nevertheless put to the torture, and though, when nothing further could be extracted from him, he seems to have been set at liberty, he appears to have remained under a cloud, and it is known that his career closed while he was still in a state of gloom and despondency. Such were the vague accusations, which, heightened and exaggerated by the censorious tongues of the seventeenth century, involved the reputation of Marlowe in an unmerited eclipse of over three centuries' duration. 'Kit' Marlowe was a leading spirit among a group of writers for the stage whose lives, we have little reason to doubt, were far from exemplary; the accumulation of evidence has left us equally little ground for supposing that the life of Marlowe was exceptionally wicked or depraved.

To Greene's *Menaphon* of 1589 Nash contributed an epistle to university students, in which he ridicules 'those idiote art masters who intrude themselves to our eares as the alcumists of eloquence; who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbrave better pens with the swelling bombast of a bragging blank verse.' Greene and Nash were the self-constituted bullies who attacked every new-comer among the small corporation of playwrights; and these remarks were clearly aimed at Marlowe, who had stamped bragging blank verse as his own, and in the defiant prologue to *Tamburlaine* had in 1587-8 thrown the gauntlet down for rhyming mother wits to pick up if they chose.[1]

The term alchemist was well applied to Marlowe. He

[1] 'From jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.'

borrowed the unrhymed metre of the pedants and rendered it acceptable to the popular element in the audience. He took the romantic themes of the playwrights who catered for the popular element, and rendered them palatable to the scholarly part of his audience in defiance of the set rules and the unities of antique and classical models. This was the alchemy by which he transmuted the base metal of such productions as *Gorboduc* or *The Misfortunes of Arthur* into the gold ore of *Edward II.*, a play which, in Lamb's opinion, furnished hints that Shakespeare scarce improved in his *Richard II.*

The introduction of Blank Verse.

It would of course be incorrect to say that Marlowe introduced blank verse into England, much more so to say that he invented it. He was not even the first to adapt it to the purposes of the English drama. Yet Marlowe's blank verse was truly a new thing. Surrey and the authors of *Gorboduc*, misled by classical usage, had aimed at composing blank verse upon the model of Greek iambics. Confusing accent with quantity, they regarded accentuated and unaccentuated syllables as respectively long and short. Hence the object was to end each line with a strongly accentuated syllable, immediately preceded by one that was unaccentuated; in the rest of the line unaccentuated and accentuated syllables occurred alternately. Then, to complete the stiff monotony, at the end of each verse came a pause, which effectually excluded all freedom of movement. Peele, indeed, had done a good deal to vary the pause and the accent and break the monotony of the end-stopt lines.[1] But Marlowe with his *Tamburlaine* freed the

[1] Take, for instance, Paris's vindication of himself:

'First, then, arraigned of partiality
Paris replies "Unguilty of the fact";
His reason is because he knew no more

metre at one stroke from useless mechanical trammels and conventional restraints. He thus first vindicated for blank verse the 'sovereignty which it has since retained among English dramatic metres, together with the ascendancy which it has acquired among metres employed in other branches of English poetic composition. This he achieved with a rapidity and completeness to which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a parallel in literary history.'[1] The sonorous roll of the verse in *Tamburlaine* left much to be desired in the way of variety. Subsequently Marlowe learned to breathe sweetness and softness into his 'mighty line.' His 'music, in which there is no echo of any man's before him,' found its own echo in the harmonies of Shakespeare and Milton. He not only 'guided Shakespeare into the right way of work,' but he also tutored the whole body of contemporary dramatists in a similar direction, so that as long as the Elizabethan impulse lasted, the English drama, having once quitted rhyme in the early nineties of the sixteenth century, did not return to it again. The writers who used blank verse before 1587 wrote it as they would write heroic couplets, omitting only the rhyme. One has only to read the least vigorous of the speeches of Tamburlaine to perceive at once the stupendous change wrought by Marlowe. A metrical system as mechanical as wood and iron could make it is changed incontinently into one of almost

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Fair Venus Ceston than Dame Juno's mace
Nor never saw wise Pallas' crystal shield.
Then as I looked, I loved and liked att once,
And as it was referred from them to me
To give the prize to her whose beauty best
My fancy did command, so did I praise
And judge as might my dazzled eyes discern.'

[1] Cf. Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*, 1899, i. 361.

unlimited flexibility and power. Shakespeare 'absorbed the mighty line, and gave it out again with its familiar cadences in *Romeo and Juliet*, and later with many broad and lively modifications. It has become the life-blood of our literature: Marlowe's place is thus at the heart of English poetry and his pulses still thrill in our verse.'[1]

The three most distinctive plays of Marlowe might well be termed a trilogy of Lust's Dominion: *Tamburlaine* illustrates the lust of boundless conquest; *Faustus*, the lust of boundless knowledge; *The Jew of Malta*, the lust of boundless wealth. The theme of each is the operation of the energy and will-power of man under the dominion of a superhuman lust. The minor characters are naught; all the interest is absorbed by the chief figures. Beings devoid of conscience, remorse or humour, these are monsters rather than human beings. Just as the Machiavellian prince or the economic man, so these creations of Marlowe's have much in them of the mere abstraction. It was as if the old 'morality' leapt up fiercely in its last expiring struggle. It was, nevertheless, Marlowe more than any single man who, by the transfusion of the blood of passion, utterly transformed while he reinvigorated the national drama as it had survived from the Middle Ages.

*Tamburlaine.*

Marlowe's first play, *Tamburlaine*, was acted in 1588, possibly in 1587.[2] It is a dramatization of the conquests of Timur, or, as Marlowe calls him, Tamburlaine the Great, a Scythian shepherd who conquers Alexander's empire, and whose triumphant progress is as ruthless as it is irresistible. The

[1] See *Encycl. Britannica*, 9th ed., Art. Marlowe, by A. C. Swinburne.

[2] The two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*, forming a 'tragedy in ten acts,' each act with its 'crop of corpses,' were published together anonymously in 1590.

first part concludes with a single act of clemency to the Soldan of Damascus, who happens to be the father of the conqueror's inamorata:

> 'Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove,
> Brighter than is the silver Rhodope,
> Fairer than whitest snow on Scythian hills,—
> Thy person is more worth to Tamburlaine
> Than the possession of the Persian crown,
> Which gracious stars have promised at my birth.
> A hundred Tartars shall attend on thee,
> Mounted on steeds swifter than Pegasus . . .
> With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled
> Thou shalt be drawn amidst the frozen pools
> And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops,
> Which with thy beauty will be soon resolved.
> My martial prizes with five hundred men,
> Won on the fifty-headed Volga's waves
> Shall we all offer to Zenocrate
> And then myself to fair Zenocrate.'

Marlowe obtained his material chiefly from Pedro Mexia's Spanish *Life of Timur*, contained in his *Silva*, published at Madrid in 1543, and translated into English in 1571 (*apud* Fortescue's *The Foreste*). He appears to have supplemented this source by the help of the *Vita Magni Tamerlanis* (1551) of Petrus Perondinus with hints of Persian effeminacy derived from classical writers such as Herodotus and Xenophon. Tamburlaine enters at sc. ii., and completely dominates the scene thenceforth. It was a trying part for any actor; yet Ned Alleyn, then barely twenty-two, achieved in it the first of those triumphs which earned him the title of Roscius of the Elizabethan stage. The popularity of the piece must have been immense. The sublime fervour of the rodomontade more than compensated the groundlings for the absence of

rhyme. The specimen quoted above, though surpassed in every way by the oft-quoted passages on Ambition (ii. 7) and Beauty (v. 1), or the lines:

> 'Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles?
> Usumcasane and Therimadas,
> Is it not passing brave to be a king
> And ride in triumph through Persepolis?'

is yet thoroughly typical of the movement of the play from one purple patch to another through a wilderness of barbaric extravagance.

It is 'difficult to overrate the importance of *Tamburlaine* in the history of the English drama.' The genius of Shakespeare, working upon the materials and models afforded by Lyly, Greene, Peele, Kyd, and the others, would have evolved the Romantic Drama in England there is little doubt, without the intervention of Marlowe. Nevertheless the great stroke by which we were preserved from the numbing regimen of two and a half centuries of frigid classical drama (such as obtained in France until the great emancipation wrought by *Hernani*) was brought about by *Tamburlaine*. Like Marlowe's other plays, *Tamburlaine* is a one-man, one-part piece. The terrific figure of the hero moves through it like an avalanche. Language appalling and astounding, yet in a high degree grand and poetic, pours from his lips in blank verse metrically superb, yet unimpeded in its flow by the accidents of metre. The incidents of the play are of correspondingly sensational import. Tamburlaine pauses occasionally for breath, and in the intervals of ornate rhetoric or furious invective utters orders for the slaughter of garrisons, the execution of chieftains, the caging of Bajazet, whom he feeds like an animal through the bars of his cage, the razing and desolation of cities and territories over which he has swept like

a pestilence. He drives a chariot drawn by captive kings. 'Hola, ye pampered jades of Asia!' he cries, as he scourges the novel coach-horses. 'Crouch, ye kings, and tremble when you hear the scourge':

> 'What! can ye draw but twenty miles a day . . .
> To make you fierce, and fit my appetite
> You shall be fed with flesh as raw as blood,
> And drink in pails the strongest muscadel;
> If you can live with it, then live and draw
> My chariot swifter than the racking clouds;
> If not, then die like beasts, and fit for naught
> But perches for the black and fatal ravens.'

In spite of this regimen the jades are found broken-winded, and are taken out smoking to be hung, two 'spare kings' being bridled and bitted in their room. Thus he drives furiously to the siege of Babylon. 'Drown them all,' he shouts, concerning the inhabitants, men, women, and children. His sons' legacy is to rifle the kingdoms he leaves unsacked. In the meantime he will try and exhaust death by the amount of slaughter he perpetrates. 'Give me a map, then let me see how much is left for me to conquer all the world.' He cuts his arm to show his son that a wound is nothing. 'Blood is the god of war's rich livery.' When in spite of the lesson one of the sons lingers in the camp during a battle, he breaks out:

> 'Scum and tartar of the elements,
> Image of sloth and picture of a slave.'

'Witness, ye cankered curs of Asia,' he says, as he sheathes his dagger in his child, and so on, and so on, until, having reached the limits of despotic fury, and having uttered a frenzied defiance of death, he dies.

Like one of the grotesque scenes in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedie*, the episode of the harnessed monarchs of Asia

was long a source of merriment to the Elizabethan playgoer.[1] But there is more ground for wonder than amusement in the fact that, even amid all this shocking bombast and clap-trap, the splendour of Marlowe's literary and poetic faculty is everywhere discernible.

It would have seemed impossible for the author of *Tamburlaine* to eclipse that piece in popular estimation; yet his next production threw into yet stronger relief than its predecessor the transcendent genius of Marlowe. Pre-eminently bold was his choice of material for his next play—the old story of a man's contract with the devil.

*Dr. Faustus* (acted 1588-9).

The bold are proverbially fortunate. Marlowe found a fine setting of the old fable ready to his hand. The story had crystallized round Dr. Faustus (fl. 1520), a strolling necromancer of South Germany, the successor of the great Rhineland wizards as they were reputed, Tritheim, Paracelsus, and Cornelius Agrippa. The legend of *Faustus* went on growing and being improved until it was worked up into a connected *Life and Adventures of Dr. Johann Faust, Master of the Black Art, with how he sold himself to the Devil*, printed at Frankfurt in 1587. The life of such a famous magician could not fail to be popular; it had a large sale and was promptly translated from German into various tongues. The early copies of little books of this kind are specially apt to be thumbed out of existence, and the first version that now exists in England is dated 1592; but this is expressly described as a new and amended edition.

[1] Cf. 2 *Henry IV.*, II. iv. 178, and Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*. A chariot drawn by crowned kings had previously been introduced in Gascoigne's *Jocasta*, Dumb Show to Act II. Marlowe's Jew, too, with his big nose is often referred to, and in the *Merry Wives* is an allusion to Mephisto. With the 'Helen' passage in *Faustus*, cf. *Troilus*, II. ii. 82.

That used by Marlowe[1] was probably dated 1587-8. *The Tragicall History of Dr. Faustus*, as Marlowe's play was called, became very popular both in England and by means of translations in Germany and the Low Countries. It kept Marlowe's fame alive in Germany down to 1829, when Goethe exclaimed, 'How greatly it is all planned!' He had thought of translating it: he was fully aware that Shakespeare did not stand alone. There is less declamation in *Faustus* than in *Tamburlaine*; the verse is somewhat freer; there is rather more dramatic variety and much more human feeling, with a considerable leaven of pathos. The dictum that it is 'greatly planned' does not seem particularly apposite, if that be precisely what Goethe said. The planning is mainly that of the obscure writer who produced the Faust-book at Frankfurt. There is remarkably little shaping of materials into dramatic form. As with *Tamburlaine*, it is a succession of scenes, some greater than any in that piece, others much more trivial. First enters Chorus who makes a speech and then draws a curtain, discovering Faustus, seated in his study, meditating that, in contrast to the limitations of human knowledge,

> 'These metaphysics of magicians
> And necromantic books are heavenly.'

Then come his visions of magical power in a passage which gives the keynote of his ambition:

[1] It is plain that Marlowe followed the text of the old Faust-book pretty closely, and that the English version was from the first edition of the German, before the additions of 1590. In book-form the *editio princeps* of Marlowe's play is the quarto of 1604, republished with slight changes in 1609. There is a later version, altered and expanded, dated 1616, and incorporating work by other hands (largely buffooneries by Rowley), though *possibly* preserving portions of Marlowe's original work omitted in the quarto of 1604.

'How am I glutted with conceit of this!
Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the Ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates:
I'll have them read me strange Philosophy
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings. . . .
I'll have them fill the public schools with silk
Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad;
I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring
And chase the Prince of Parma from our land,
And reign sole king of all our provinces.'

The somewhat vulgar nature of these desires is significant of the lack of symbolism in Marlowe's conception of the story. Next we have Faust's first colloquy with Mephistopheles, a superb scene, in which the headstrong blindness of man's folly in pursuit of some idealized whim is brought out with an appalling clearness. Scenes viii. to xiii. are occupied by the tricks that Faustus plays by conjuring, derived from the old Faust-book; and here there is more horseplay and buffoonery than satire, the opportunities of the situation as a vehicle for irony being almost entirely ignored, though we have an amusing caricature of a precisian and Faust's significant request to Mephisto:

'Go, and return an old Franciscan friar:
That holy shape becomes a devil best.'

Scene xiv. contains the magnificent apostrophe to Helen, whom Faust requires as his paramour.

'Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships?'

Scene xvi. brings us to the agony of Faust's last hour previous to the expiration of his twenty-four years' contract with the devil. The soliloquy, which culminates in the shrill-voiced terror of the damned soul, is of a tragic intensity which is unsurpassed in any play that is known to us. Where else in the whole range of dramatic literature shall we find a climax at once so terrible and so grotesque?

*Jew of Malta.*

The greatest piece of 'planning' that Marlowe achieved, as it seems to us, is the construction of his next play, *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, written in all probability during 1589 (it was familiar to the stage in 1591; it was entered in the Stationers' Books in May, 1594, but was not published until 1633). It is not known where Marlowe derived the materials for his play, but the plot is of the most elaborate kind known to the stage, and is full of startling and improbable situations; while the novel idea of introducing a Jew upon the stage,[1] and rendering him at one and the same time odious and ridiculous to the spectators promised a sensational effect not a whit inferior to that produced by his previous plays. In Barabas, the rich Jew, avarice ceases to be a sordid vice, and swells to the proportions of a dominating passion. The masterful grasp that marks the opening scene was a new thing in English tragedy. Language so strong, so terse, so reverberating had never been heard before on the English stage. Had the character been developed through-

[1] For his conception of a typical Jew as a cruel usurer and Christian-hater Marlowe seems to revert to the ideas prevalent under John and Henry III. It is noteworthy that the piece is introduced by 'Machiavel,' whose principle of the excellence of *virtù* affords a key to some of Marlowe's leading conceptions (see Courthope, *English Poetry*, ii. 405).

out with the same power as in the first two acts, Barabas would have been worthy to stand beside Shylock.[1] As, however, Faustus degenerates into a vulgar conjuror (in scenes xi. and xii.), so Barabas, when he develops into a fiend incarnate (like Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*), regarding the most horrible atrocities as the chief end and aim of his existence, loses his hold not only upon our sympathy, but also upon our interest. The character is taken out of the range of humanity, and becomes a caricature. By this means the last three acts, though cleverly contrived, become little more than a concatenation of the crudest horrors. Marlowe pandered, in short, to that portion of the London crowd which rose at *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedie*.

Marlowe's remaining great play is in a vein very different from that of its predecessors. It is much less of an essay and more of a finished production; in form, indeed, it closely resembles one of Shakespeare's history plays.

[1] The first two acts afford several striking parallelisms. The *bravura* passage, in which Barabas is depicted gloating over his gems, 'infinite riches in a little room' (the 'very poetry of avarice'!), his coffers of gold and his merchandise, is unsurpassed by anything in *The Merchant of Venice*. Leigh Hunt quotes the passage concluding:

> 'Why, then, I hope my ships
> I sent for Egypt and the bordering isles
> Are gotten up by Nilus' winding banks;
> *Mine argosies from Alexandria*
> *Loaden with spice and silks, now under sail*
> *Are smoothly gliding down by Candy shore*
> *To Malta through our Mediterranean sea.*'

Note the wonderful sweetness of these four lines, particularly the last. The variety of the vowels, the delicate alliteration, and the lapse of the two concluding verses are equal as a study to anything in Spenser.

In dramatic variety it marks a great advance upon anything that Marlowe had yet accomplished. It may, perhaps, be regarded as 'the only unadulterated expression of Marlowe's dramatic art.' It is, at any rate, the first specimen in our language of true historical drama. It has less of the distinctive Marlowesque qualities; there is less 'altisonant' verse and possibly less poetry, but there is certainly less extravagance and far less bombast.

*Edward II.*

*The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward II.* was written in 1590 and published in 1594, though the first quarto that we have in England is dated 1598. It was very probably written to cap Peele's *Famous Chronicle of Edward I.*, and was based upon authorities very similar to those used by Shakespeare for his historical plays, namely, Holinshed (1577) and Stowe (1580), with occasional reference to Fabyan (especially for II. ii. 188 *sq.*) and possibly to other chronicles; but it exhibits much less dependence upon the chronicles than previous works of the kind, and it may be said to mark the completed evolution of the Elizabethan history play. Charles Lamb's commendation of *Edward II.* has already been referred to, and of the death-scene the same critic wrote that 'it moved terror and pity beyond any scene ancient or modern.' The Gaveston scenes are extraordinarily fine: after the favourite's death the interest strays, but is finally arrested by the ultimate fate of the King, and the last scenes are harrowing almost beyond the limits of legitimate tragedy. The characters are multiplied in a manner quite novel to Marlowe's art; yet upon the whole they are well differentiated, with the exception of Queen Isabella, a disconsolate wife, who is transformed at a moment's notice into a monster of cruelty and deceit. The play has had the honour of being compared by Lamb with Shakespeare's

*Richard II.* In Marlowe's play there is none of the psychological interest that attaches to *Richard II.*, and nothing equivalent to the superb rhetoric of John of Gaunt. Both plays are deficient in humour; but Shakespeare makes us sympathize with Richard as a man of rich poetic endowment, though constitutionally unfit to govern, while for Edward our compassion is of a more purely physical kind. Still, *Edward II.* stands upon its general dramatic power. That it should be able to sustain such a comparison on this ground is the clearest evidence of the debt that Shakespeare owed to such a predecessor as Marlowe.[1]

Brief space must be found here for the mention of a class of plays distinct from any that have been enumerated, a class which exhibited little elevation of style, but which, nevertheless, attained in the case of a few examples to a high degree of tragic intensity and power. They were plays for which the materials were drawn from the records of contemporary crime, domestic tragedies in which the authors adhered with close fidelity to the facts narrated by the pamphleteer or the his-

[1] Of Marlowe's two other pieces—the hastily written topical play, *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), denouncing the crimes of Guise and the tragedy of St. Bartholomew's Day, and the unfinished prentice-play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, completed by Nash and produced in 1594—it is only needful to say that they must be regarded as *parerga*, not as worthily representing his mature powers. *Dido*, however, has some characteristic lines, such as those in Dido's appeal to Aeneas to stay at Carthage:

> 'I'll give thee tackling made of riveted gold,
> Wound on the barks of odoriferous trees;
> Oars of massy ivory full of holes,
> Through which the water shall delight to play.'

The majority of the critics are of opinion that Marlowe was responsible for a large but undefined share in *Henry VI.* There are editions of Marlowe by Dyce (1850), Cunningham, and Bullen: a reissue of the last is promised—1904.

torian, in which fancy found but little scope and from which poetical ornament was rigidly excluded.

*Arden of Feversham.*

Four of these 'murder plays' have come down to us from the last decade of the sixteenth and the first of the seventeenth century: (1) *Arden of Feversham*, 1592; (2) *A Warning for Faire Women*, 1599; (3) Robert Yarington's *Two Tragedies in One*, 1601; (4) *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, 1608. The finest of these was printed during the 'experimental' period of Shakespeare's career as a playwright, and the plot is derived from the chronicler Holinshed, upon whom Shakespeare drew so freely for his chronicle plays. The drift of the story is clearly indicated by the title: *The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent, who was most wickedlye murdered, by the meanes of his disloyall and wanton wife, who for the love she bare to one Mosbie, hyred two desperate ruffians Blackwill and Shaklag to murder him*, and the murder so powerfully depicted actually took place in 1551. The author describes his work in an epilogue as 'naked tragedy': it is indeed unadorned, crude, and to some extent barbaric. But it strikes the reader, as few Elizabethan plays do, by the intensity of its love passages and the directness of its appeal when passion is the theme. The original handling of the story, the deliberate strength of the language, suggest a writer in his maturity, while the realization of feminine passion in Alice Arden indicates a skill in the portraiture of a woman far beyond the attainment of Marlowe. The piece was published early in 1592, probably written in a previous year—at a time, that is, when Shakespeare had not yet emerged from the euphuistic phase. The baldness of the diction in *Arden*, no less than the gloomily tragic conception of Alice, precludes the idea of the Shakespearean origin of the drama, though it is quite possible that Shakespeare may have corrected and revised such a popular play for stage production. There is no external evidence whatever that Shakespeare either wrote or revised it, and there is no other contemporary playwright whose style can be said to approximate to it at all closely. At a period, however, so rich in dramatic genius, there is no extravagance in ascribing

it, as we shall have to ascribe *Titus Andronicus*, to an anonymous outsider.

The *Yorkshire Tragedy*, largely written in prose, and both played and printed in 1608, is a crudely powerful realization of something like demoniac possession; it was attributed to Shakespeare on the title-page of the old quarto, and some modern critics have held it to be his on account of its intensity; but it is, both in manner and conception, utterly un-Shakespearean. It is based upon a murder story related by Stowe in his *Chronicle* under 1604.

But the last word in connexion with the drama before Shakespeare is due not to these murky plays, but to the overshadowing genius of Marlowe. His fame has grown rapidly under the searchlights of modern criticism; and some critics have deprecated the exaggeration of his merit. But to us it seems more desirable, even yet, to insist not only upon the intrinsic value of what he did before his premature death in 1593, but also, and even more, upon the importance of his work, coming when it did, namely between 1587 and the first independent essays of Shakespeare.

Marlowe is not pre-eminently a thinker, or even a dramatist, but a poet, a master of epical utterance, whose *perferridum ingenium* enabled him to soar above the region of the rude and inchoate, in which his contemporaries were groping, and to fuse imagination and diction in verse at once nervous and energetic, spontaneous and translucent. He moulds this verse in his own image, fierce, elemental, impassioned, even when most rhapsodical.

He has a weakness for tumid utterance and grandiloquent sound. With this we associate his love of musical proper names, his fondness for harping on a limited number of favourite epithets, his passion for ringing the changes upon fatigued forms of classical imagery. But

these tendencies are merely the accidents of an extraordinary faculty for generating heat and light. With all the faults of their creator thick upon them, there is more of the ring of true poetry about a few passages in *Faustus* or the first two acts of *The Jew of Malta*, than in all the rest of the pre-Shakespearean drama put together.

As Spenser was the *novus homo*, the 'new poet' of our literature in 1579, who naturalized melody and harmony in our poetry, so Marlowe was the *novus homo* of our theatre some ten years later; who swept away the heterogeneous lumber of creaking Seneca and crazy Morality, and, while annihilating the old, virtually created a new type of play in *Edward II.*; who centralized the interest of, and so concentrated the vigour and the intellect of the English people upon a truly national stage; and who, last but not least, naturalized blank verse upon the English boards, and not only wrote it first, but wrote it better than any other Elizabethan, with the solitary exception of Shakespeare.

What separates him from Shakespeare is his inability to individualize his characters. But there are not wanting indications in *Edward II.* which render it conceivable that, had he lived beyond his twenty-nine years, he might have stood second only to Shakespeare—far below him in humour and in power to depict men and women—yet possibly supreme in a different province of dramatic art. As it was, he was 'the herald who dropped dead in announcing the victory, the fruits of which he was not to share.'

> 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel bough.'

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NOTE on Elizabethan stagecraft (p. 18). Additional information on this subject will be found in *The Tribune*, 12 Oct. 1907; *Quarterly Rev.*, April 1908; C. F. Reynolds, *Eliz. Staging*, 1905; C. M. Gayley, *Plays of our Forefathers*, 1907; Mantzius, *Hist. of Theatr. Art*, 1904.

## CHAPTER II.

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

§ 1. *Life.*—§ 2. *Experimental Plays.*—§ 3. *History and Comedy.*—§ 4. *Tragedy.*—§ 5. *Romance.*—§ 6. *Metrical Development.*—§ 7. *Use of Prose.*—§ 8. *General Characteristics.*—§ 9. *Shakespeareana.*

### § 1. *Life.*

Outline of Shakespeare's life.

The son of John Shakespeare, a prosperous trader of Stratford-on-Avon, who married in 1557 Mary Arden, the daughter of a wealthy farmer in the neighbourhood, William Shakespeare was born in what is now Henley Street, Stratford, on April 23rd, 1564.[1] He was the eldest child of his parents that survived infancy. He was, we may be sure, sent to the Free Grammar School, the buildings of which still adorn Stratford, and was well grounded in Latin authors such as Ovid, Mantuanus, and the *Colloquia* of Erasmus, with a little Seneca and Terence, but he probably learned no Greek. He married, probably in November, 1582, being then not nineteen, Anne Hathaway (aged twenty-six), the daughter of a substantial yeoman of Shottery, a hamlet reached by a short walk through the fields from Stratford. A child, Susanna, was born six months after the church marriage, but it is not improbable that they were united previously by a contract of espousals.

[1] It is just possible that his birthday was April 22nd, but he was certainly baptized on April 26th.

It is said that a poaching escapade upon the estate of Sir Thomas Lucy led to young Shakespeare's departure from Stratford. Whatever the circumstances, he was drawn to London, where he settled between 1582 and 1586-7.[1] Lyly's plays were then the topmost fashion. He joined a theatrical company, known as the Earl of Leicester's, at first, it may be, in a quite humble capacity. On Leicester's death in September, 1588, the patronage of this company passed to Lord Strange; after 1594 it was known as the Lord Chamberlain's company. The company moved their headquarters in London several times before 1599, when they settled at the Globe on Bankside, Southwark; they also acted in the country. It is improbable that Shakespeare ever acted abroad. He was already a prominent actor in 1594, when he played with Burbage and Kemp before the Queen at Greenwich. Two parts in his own plays assigned to him by tradition are Adam in *As You Like It* and the Ghost in *Hamlet*, while a contemporary panegyrist of the dramatist as 'our English Terence' refers to his having 'plaid kingly parts in sport' (Davies, *Scourge of Folly*, 1611). From minor posts as servitor,

[1] Seventeenth-century tradition can be cited in favour of the supposition that in early life, and before he discovered his vocation, Shakespeare was a wild young scapegrace who played many parts. He is said to have been at one time a butcher, at another a schoolmaster, at another a lawyer's clerk. The tradition is quite consistent with the deer-stealing episode, if we regard that as a positive incident, with his hurried marriage, with the Micawberish characteristics of his father, with his 'flight' to London along the much traversed western road through Oxford to the capital, and equally with his subsequent success. A curious question is raised by Sonnets 37 and 89 as to whether Shakespeare suffered from lameness. There is no evidence of this apart from the sonnets, and the language there may well be metaphorical. For the marriage and departure from Stratford see J. W. Gray, *Shakespeare's Marriage*, 1905; cf. C. I. Elton's *William Shakespeare, his Family and Friends*, 1904.

prompter, or actor of small parts, such as we may believe that he held at the theatre[1] upon his first arrival in London, it seems pretty safe to assume that in a very few years' time Shakespeare attained to the position of author-in-ordinary to his company, at first more especially in the capacity of reviser and adapter of existing dramatic work. Thus about 1591-2 he touched up a chronicle play, of uncertain origin, on the reign of Henry VI., upon which Marlowe is supposed to have already tried his hand. In 1592 (about which time or a little later he lodged with a wig-maker named Mountjoy at the corner of Silver and Monkwell Streets in the city) it is clear that he was a rapidly rising and popular writer for the stage. 'There is' wrote Greene on his deathbed, 'an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers that, with his *tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*,[2] supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes Factotum is in his owne conceyt the onely *Shake-scene* in a countrie.' These words were addressed to Marlowe, Lodge, Nash, and Peele (who were, like Greene, university men), and express fear of a too-successful rival who was scorned as a mere underbred actor with only a country grammar-school education.

From 1591 to 1611 we know that Shakespeare was producing plays in a series commencing with *Love's Labour's Lost* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and ending with *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, at the rate of rather more than three plays in every two years. Meanwhile, in April, 1593, he published his sensuous and euphuistic poem of *Venus and Adonis*, 'the first heir of my invention,' fol-

[1] Probably that known as The Theater, in Shoreditch.

[2] Distortion of a phrase from 3 *Henry VI.* (I. iv. 137).

' *Love*, his first printed work; possibly also the first work he planned. It was published by a Stratfordian in London, Richard

lowed in May, 1594, by the more sententious and quasi-didactic *Lucrece*. Both were dedicated in terms that indicated a growing intimacy with a very rich young nobleman, Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, 'the handsomest man about the court.' If it be the fact that Shakespeare addressed to him a number of the *Sonnets* which he probably began writing about this time,[1] it is clear that Southampton was more than a nominal patron.

All this time Shakespeare was rather rapidly accumulating property, a process which he continued until the end of his life. In 1596 he went down to Stratford and released his father from grave pecuniary difficulties. Next year he bought for £60 (say about £400 in our money) the largest house in Stratford, called New Place,[2] and in 1599, after several vain attempts, he and his father succeeded in procuring from the Heralds' College a coat of arms.[3] About 1597-9 his yearly income is estimated at £180 per annum (at least £800 in our money), while during the last six years of his life, having built up a large landed estate at Stratford, he can have been in receipt of little if at all less than £4,000 a year in our values. The bulk of his capital, previous to his speculations in land, appears to have been derived directly from his proprietary shares in the Globe Theatre. We know that the royal patronage he had enjoyed under Elizabeth was even extended under James, and the company for which he continued steadily to write became known after 1603 as 'the King's men.'

Field. The first quartos of Shakespearean plays (barring the doubtful *Henry VI.*) appeared in 1597.

[1] 1593 4. *Shakespeare's Sonnets.* Never before Imprinted, were issued by G. Eld for T. T., without the author's sanction, in 1609. See vol. i., p. 24.

[2] The foundations of which are all that is now to be seen.

[3] Technically not a new grant, but an exemplification of one assumed to be already in possession of the family.

No fewer than seven of his plays were produced at the court festivities of May, 1613. The contrast is great between the feckless improvidence and the poverty-stricken lives of fellow-dramatists such as Greene and Marlowe, Nash, Peele and Dekker, and the worldly success that Shakespeare attained. The most intimate literary friendship of Shakespeare was that which existed between him and Ben Jonson, while with John Fletcher, who may almost be considered as a pupil, he had increasingly close relations towards the end of his active career as a dramatist. This can be assigned with some certainty to 1611-12, when Shakespeare seems to have retired to Stratford, though he retained a house at Blackfriars and paid occasional visits to London down to 1614 or possibly 1615. He died at New Place, on April 23rd, 1616,[1] and was buried in the chancel of Stratford-on-Avon Church. With the apparent intention of 'keeping things together,' he left nearly all his property to his elder and shrewder daughter, Mrs. Hall. The fact that the will almost ignored his wife does not of itself show more than that he did not consider her a fit person to intrust with the management of his estate.

Emerson in *English Traits* dwells upon our '*unsurprised* reception of Shakespeare—the reception proved by his making his fortune, and the apathy proved by the absence of all contemporary panegyric.' Yet it would be quite untrue to say

[1] On this day Oliver Cromwell was admitted a fellow-commoner at Sidney-Sussex. Cervantes died on April 23rd, 1616 (new style), that is, ten days earlier. Cervantes resembled Shakespeare in the grand edifice of wisdom which he raised upon a narrow foundation of learning. An elaborate monument was erected above Shakespeare's grave a year or so after his death (before 1623). It bore the elegiac distich:

'Judicio Pylium, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,
Terra tegit, populus maeret, Olympus habet.'

that Shakespeare was not honoured by his own age and country. In 1598 a Cambridge scholar, Francis Meres, wrote of Shakespeare, in his *Palladis Tamia*, as the best dramatic writer of the time, 'most excellent in both kinds for the stage'; and in proof of his assertion he mentioned six comedies and six historical or tragic plays by Shakespeare with which he was familiar. Ten years later the unauthorized publisher of the play-book of *Troilus and Cressida* wrote of Shakespeare as an author so highly esteemed that people who ordinarily objected to plays made an exception in favour of his.[1] Not only did the people of London flock day after day to see his plays performed in their integrity (a thing which they never have done since), but the greatest poet and the greatest playwright of the age, after Shakespeare himself, honoured themselves by praising him in language which for justness and valiancy has never been surpassed. Spenser wrote of 'his muse, full of high thoughts invention'; while Jonson in the commendatory verses prefixed to the first collective edition of the plays, after apostrophizing him as 'Soule of the Age, The Applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage,' went on to declare: 'He was not of an age but for all time.' In the next generation, our great scholar-poet, Milton, wrote that noble epitaph on 'the great heir of fame':

> 'What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
> The labour of an age in pilèd stones?
> Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid
> Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
> Dear son of Memory, great heir of Fame,
> What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
> Thou in our wonder and astonishment
> Hast built thyself a livelong monument.'

[1] For a corpus of contemporary references to Shakespeare see *Shakespeare's Centuric of Praise* [1591-1693], New Shakspere Society, 2nd edit., 1879, and *Some 300 Fresh Allusions to Shakespeare* [1594-1694], 1886. Cf. *The Praise of Shakespeare* (ed. Hughes), 1904. And see vol. i. of this work, pp. 46, 86, 88, 107, 109, 196.

A genuine poet of the opposite pole, Sir John Suckling, took care to go down to posterity through the medium of a portrait by Vandyck, holding a copy of the Shakespeare folio in his hand.

The 'refined age' (as it deemed itself) of Charles II. regarded the Elizabethan writers as rude, just as some of our coxcombs profess to be shocked by 'Early Victorian.' The great historical antiquary, Rymer, discovered in Shakespeare little more than a tissue of solecisms and absurdities, while the worthy Samuel Pepys pronounced *Romeo and Juliet* the 'worst' and *Midsummer Night's Dream* 'the most ridiculous and insipid' play he 'ever saw in his life.' Dryden himself was very much in awe of Monsieur Boileau, and inclined to think that there must, after all, be a good deal in the French veneration for the sacred unities and other Aristotelian canons. Nevertheless, when the occasion arose, he testified nobly for Shakespeare in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. 'He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards and found her there. . . . He is always great when some great occasion is presented to him, the consideration of which made Mr. Hales of Eton (the ever memorable) say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of by Shakespeare.' Thus then we have the unanimous testimony of our two great scholar-poets of old time, Spenser and Milton (echoed, it may be said, by all the greatest poets of the nineteenth century, including Goethe and Hugo), of our greatest dramatist after Shakespeare, and of the one great critic of the seventeenth century. When we reach the age of Pope we find the supremacy of Shakespeare's genius generally acknowledged. Thenceforth the growth of his reputation will have to be treated under the heading of commentators and critics, a rapidly increasing multitude.

## § 2. *Experimental Plays.*

In however menial a capacity Shakespeare may first have assisted the theatrical company which he joined between the ages of 18 and 22, it can hardly have been long before the intelligent members of it discovered that they had to do with a youth of the most extraordinary promise. That further the young Shakespeare would have very soon read all the plays and romances he could lay his hands upon, and learned all he could of the working of the theatre, may be regarded as certain. As Napoleon made suggestions at Toulon when he was merely a lieutenant, so Shakespeare may early have made suggestions, the value of which instantaneously struck his superiors. That a time quickly came when plays would be put into his hands for alteration and suggestion is very probable. Among the average crowd of players, whose appreciation of dramatic effect was keen while their literary aptitude was nil, the value of such a co-operator from their own ranks would be doubly emphasized. Even at that time, no one so well as he could adapt parts to the individual performers. Once he had been allowed to do such work, belief in his talent would increase rapidly. His colleagues may well have come to regard him as the prospective champion of the despised play-actors against the scholars and wits, from Court or University, who had hitherto aspired to a monopoly in play-writing. It is not surprising that in 1590 or 1591 the company should have accepted from Shakespeare[1] a play entirely his own.

Necessarily the young Shakespeare's work would be experimental and, almost necessarily, imitative. Of the

[1] Then about twenty-six years old.

seven plays generally acknowledged to be first in chronological order, six are undoubtedly experimental or imitative, or both.[1] These six are the comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and the chronicle-histories, *Henry VI.*, *Richard III.*, and *Richard II.* It is a fair inference that the seventh, *Romeo and Juliet*,[2] is the last or almost the last of the series.

*Love's Labour's Lost* (Quarto, 1598).

By a convention that has now become widely recognized, the first of these plays is *Love's Labour's Lost*. It indicates that the first literary influence to be strongly exerted upon Shakespeare was that of John Lyly. Marlowe came later. The play might almost be termed a 'conversation piece' by a youthful disciple of Lyly, but one possessed of far more poetic power and with a much greater actuality of observation and humour than his master. Shakespeare's growing intimacy with the young bloods who frequented the stage of his theatre may have led to his appropriation, with youthful audacity, of the names

[1] The plays are arranged below in an order approximately chronological, the dates given being those at which most authorities believe the plays were composed—performance in Shakespeare's case nearly always immediately followed composition. The dates given in the notes at the side of the page are those of first publication, either in players'-texts (Quartos) or in the folio volume of *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* as collected in 1623 (the 'First Folio'):

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Love's Labour's Lost* | 1590* | *Henry VI.* (Pts. II. and III. remodelled) | 1592 |
| *Comedy of Errors* | 1590-1* | *Richard III.* | 1593 |
| *Two Gentlemen of Verona* | 1591-2* | *Richard II.* | 1593-4 |

An asterisk signifies approximate.

[2] Though an attempt has been made to date it earlier (namely, 1591) to suit a wholly inconclusive phrase used by the Nurse, 'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years.'

which he had heard on their lips in connexion with that of the King of Navarre (Biron, Longueville, De Maine, and La Mothe) in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The play, the plot of which appears in the main to have been of Shakespeare's invention, embodies a number of topical allusions to court and city incidents of the day. It pokes fun at several different kinds of affected jargon analogous to Euphuism and at contemporary projects for Academies.[1] The unbroken verse and the abundance of rhyme, no less than the symmetrical grouping of the characters and fusillade of punning conceits, incline us to put its composition not later than 1590, though it was revised later, as avowed on the title-page of the players'-text or Quarto, the first to bear the name 'W. Shakespere.'

The influence of Lyly,[2] reinforced by that of Thomas Lodge, is again apparent in *Venus and Adonis*, which was printed in the summer of 1593 with a dedication to Southampton, and constituted Shakespeare's first appeal to the reading public. Southampton's acquaintance with Shakespeare was probably older than the dedication. That the author of a play like *Love's Labour's Lost* should have been presented by his admiring colleagues to the noblemen who frequented the theatre was only natural. The choice of subject seems to indicate that Shakespeare was still groping in uncertainty towards the right exercise of his powers. The poem reads like a literary exercise, and it is quite possible that the theme was suggested by Southampton.

Mere Euphuism[3] could not hold Shakespeare long. *The*

[1] See vol. i., p. 217. [2] See under Lyly, Bk. II. § 2.

[3] In speaking of the 'Euphuism' of Shakespeare's early plays, we refer not to the alliterative antitheses and fabulous similes of *Euphues* proper, but to the diluted Euphuism—the affectedly refined and periphrastic style which is specially observable in Lyly's plays.

*Comedy of Errors* is in the main broadly farcical. It was written in 1590 or 1591 (it was repeated at Gray's Inn in 1594), and, short though it is, contains a very large number, not only of rhyming lines, but also of the fourteen-syllable rhyming couplets common to the older comedy. It accentuates the reflected classicism of Shakespeare's early period, the plot being drawn from the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, with the amusing scene (III. i.) from the *Amphitruo*. It rivals *The Tempest* in its preservation of the unities. A play, *Historie of Error*, had been given, 1577 and 1583.

*The Comedy of Errors* (1623).

The *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a first and comparatively colourless attempt at sentimental comedy. The story is a new weaving of shreds drawn from Montemayor's *Diana*, translated in 1584, with additional material from Bandello or Cinthio's *Apollonius and Silla*, englished by Rich in 1581, and possibly from a play of 'Two Italian Gentlemen,' englished by Munday in 1584. The characterization is so slender in comparison with that of riper comedy that Rowe, Hanmer and Upton threw doubts upon its Shakespearean origin. Such a misprision of judgement would be far less excusable at the present day, when we know that the play was a very early, and not, as was then imagined, a fairly late performance. In the *Two Gentlemen*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Comedy of Errors*, the

*Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623).

The charm of Shakespeare's diction is present in line after line in the *Two Gentlemen*, *e.g.*:

'These shadowy, desert, unfrequented woods';

but the play is juvenile, with an exceptionally silly intrigue, the weakness of which is undisguised by skilful construction, and it is, like its congeners, youthfully imitative; thus the witty bickering of II. iv. is Lyly to the letter. 'A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off!' There are many anticipatory glimpses

grace, wit, and fun which were all to become so pre-eminent in Shakespearean comedy are all present, but present in embryo.

*Richard III.* (Quarto, 1597).

Before writing *Richard III.*, the first of his more serious dramas, Shakespeare had already touched up the old chronicle play which formed the nucleus of 1 *Henry VI.*, and had remodelled *The Contention betwixt the two famous houses of Yorke and Lancaster* (printed 1594), and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*, upon which Greene and Peele are supposed to have collaborated,[1] into *Henry VI.*, Parts II. and III. Into these same dramas at an earlier stage, Marlowe is believed to have put a quantity of his less characteristic work. *Richard III.* was written not later than 1594, and was probably Shakespeare's first great success as a dramatist.[2] It contains his first great stage figure. The play was based on Holinshed, and incorporates the conception of Richard's

of later comedy. Julia and Lucetta point to Portia and Nerissa, Silvia and Julia to Olivia and Viola. Speed is the prototype of all the rattling clowns. His catalogue of love symptoms is Shakespeare *aut diabolus*. The true English humour makes its entrance upon the stage when Launce appears dragging his dog by a string.

[1] Hence the remark about the 'upstart crow beautified with our feathers' which Greene made in his *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), and for which Chettle, Greene's stationer, instantly apologized in his *Kind Hartes Dreame*.

[2] It appeared in quarto in 1597. The received text is based mainly on the folio version, which differs very widely from that of the quarto. The relation of the two texts is one of the most difficult problems of Shakespearean textual criticism. It is possible that the quarto represented only a shortened version of the original play. The two 'crack rants,' 'Off with his head! So much for Buckingham,' and 'Conscience, avaunt! Richard's himself again,' were invented by Colley Cibber for his popular stage-version of 1700, which held the boards until 1821.

character given in Mor's Life. It is Marlowesque alike in diction and in plan. Rhyme is deliberately abandoned for blank verse, and the play is full of an emphatic and frequently strained rhetoric. The Machiavellian Richard, with his one idea and his entire unscrupulousness, dominates the play, from the opening passage in which he crudely and melodramatically announces his determination to 'play the villain' to the end, as completely as Tamburlaine dominates in *Tamburlaine the Great*. It is important to note, however, that Shakespeare's conception is by no means wholly Marlowesque. *Richard III.* is a story of the Nemesis of enormous crimes, conceived and written rather as melodrama than as tragedy, but with an ethical import foreign to the ideas of Marlowe.

*Richard II.* appears to have been written very soon after *Richard III.*, and shows a marked advance in freedom of thought and in poetic power. Though the influence of Marlowe, and especially of Marlowe's least Marlowesque play, *Edward II.*, is clearly discernible, *Richard II.* is free from the melodramatic violence of *Richard III.*, and, what is more essential, is not dominated by a single passion. The King himself is Shakespeare's first complex character-study, and the study contrasts strongly with the psychological crudity of his presentation of Richard III.[1] The verse is far more various and graceful than in the preceding play, and shows an increased command over the instrument; while the frequent return to rhyme is another indication that Marlowe's influence was already waning.

*Richard II.* (Quarto, 1597).

The bloody drama of *Titus Andronicus*, replete with horrors of every kind (which reach a climax when Titus, as

[1] The facts are again derived from Holinshed. Shakespeare's conception of Richard II. is to the historian an extremely interesting guess concerning an enigmatic personage.

*Titus Andronicus* (Quarto, 1594, 1600).

a preliminary to stabbing Queen Tamora, serves her in the garb of a cook with her two sons baked in a pie), was probably written by an amateur or 'private gentleman' (*teste* Ed. Ravenscroft, 1687), at a time when Shakespeare was still in his experimental stage (1590-3). It may well have been written in emulation of Kyd or Marlowe: but the conception is a good deal lower than that of Marlowe, whose aspiration was rather after the impossible than the merely horrible. As a composition it is more suggestive of Kyd, but the versification is too complex to admit of its being attributed to him; while the complete absence of humour and the rarity of pathos preclude us from accepting it as undiluted Shakespeare. Nevertheless the internal evidence agrees perfectly with such slight external indication as we possess to the effect that Shakespeare revised the play, introducing graceful passages here and fine poetry there, remodelling the character of Titus, and recasting the closing scene, in which (in characteristic Shakespearean style) the reign of sane government and good sense is re-established after a harvest of horrors. It seems to have been a stage success as played by Shakespeare's company. Shakespeare was, in fact, probably set to work upon it because the 'shambles' play was then in vogue, just as, later, we have the reigns of Farce, Chronicle, High Comedy, Tragedy, Romance, and Burlesque succeeding each other in the popular taste. Shakespeare's own work upon *Titus* is closely related to that in *Richard II.* and *King John*. It was acted, and printed by John Danter in quarto, in 1594.[1] It was mentioned as Shakespeare's by Francis Meres in 1598 and (like 1 *Henry VI.*) received the imprimatur of the Folio editors in 1623. Halliwell-Phillipps had an ingenious theory to the effect that when the editors inserted

[1] The first edition of 1594 was purchased in Sweden for £2,000 and resold to America, 1904.

it, they had got hold of the wrong play—and there does seem to have been more than one on the subject!

*Richard III.* marks the climax of Marlowe's influence. In *Romeo and Juliet* and *King John* Shakespeare leaves Marlowe further behind him and moves onward freely; in *Midsummer Night's Dream* he enters into sovereign possession of his own faculty. From that time onwards he goes from strength to strength.

### § 3. *History and Comedy.*

Between the production of *Richard II.* in 1593-4 and that of *Julius Cæsar* in 1601 thirteen plays were written by Shakespeare. The plays of this period are marked by increasing actuality and power of portraiture, above all, by humour. As a whole they are more rhetorical than poetical, and more humorous than rhetorical. Humour is indeed the strongest characteristic of the group. And in all these plays, with one exception, the humour is as genial as it is vital and wise: for the most constant quality of all of them, with the exception of *All's Well that Ends Well*, is their unflagging verve, the joyous swing of their movement, their light-heartedness and playfulness of dialogue. But no great heights of poetry or depths of vision are reached. Save in the solitary figure of Shylock, there is no tragic import, there is little either of passion or of pathos. The love of *Romeo and Juliet* is romantic and ideal, rather than positive and passionate: the pathos of their fate is no more than that of the thwarted desires of a boy and girl. Orlando in *As You Like It* is another Romeo, though touched with humour. Arthur's too eloquent pleading in *King John* is only sentimentally pretty as compared with the intensity of Imogen's 'Why, I must die.'[1]

[1] *Cymbeline* (1611?), III. iv. 76.

In the plays of the earliest group the women are insignificant or unimportant. In the second group the importance of women is greatly increased. Rosalind and Beatrice are, on the whole, the most prominent figures in *As You Like It* and *Much Ado*, while in *All's Well that Ends Well* the whole interest of the play is centred in a woman. But the portraits of women remain somewhat tentative and incomplete until wellnigh the end of the period. Portia, though an immeasurable advance upon the phrase-capping ladies of *Love's Labour's Lost*, is not quite realized; Helena is, in part at least, a failure. The first of Shakespeare's perfect women (within the limits of comedy) are Beatrice and Rosalind.

Another noticeable characteristic of the plays of the second group[1] is that, except in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *All's Well that Ends Well*, there is no concentration of the interest upon any single character; and the concentration on Shylock is very partial. The theme of *Henry V.* is not the personality of the King, but the splendour of his achievements. Falstaff is an incidental figure, and dominates only by force of wisdom and wit.

The poetic element of many of these plays is accidental rather than essential. *King John* is rhetorical rather than

[1] The order of the group of thirteen plays with which we are now dealing is, of course, uncertain; but they may be conveniently dealt with in a sequence which, in spite of the lack of evidence and the clash of conjecture, can be regarded as approximately chronological. Where the point is contested we have given what we take to be the 'central' date of composition. An asterisk signifies approximate:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Romeo and Juliet* . . 1594* | *Henry IV.* (Pt. II.) . . 1597-8 |
| *King John* . . . . . 1594-5* | *Henry V.* . . . . . 1598-9 |
| *Merchant of Venice* . . 1594-5* | *Merry Wives* . . . . 1599* |
| *Midsummer Night's Dream* . . . . 1593-6* | *As You Like It* . . . 1599 |
| | *Much Ado* . . . . 1599-1600 |
| *Taming of Shrew* . . . 1593-6 | *Twelfth Night* . . . . 1600-1 |
| *Henry IV.* (Pt. I.) . . 1596-7 | *All's Well* . . . [1591, 1601]* |

poetic: there are exquisite lyrical passages or songs in *The Merchant of Venice* (cf. Act V. i.) and *Twelfth Night*, but they are episodical, standing, like the haunting duet between Lorenzo and Jessica, apart from the main action of the drama. There is still a separation of poetry and life. Prince Hal is most real when he is with Falstaff, and Viola is more convincing with Olivia or Sir Toby than with the Duke. There is no such fusion of action, passion, and character in a unity of poetic conception and rendering as we get later. It might perhaps be said that no single play of this period, with the exception of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is completely a poem. Nevertheless, in this series of plays Shakespeare already reaches heights of humour, a perfection of movement, an intensity of vitality, a splendour of rhetoric, an exquisiteness of fancy, a truth of observation, a definiteness of portraiture, until then and up to now unapproached in drama.

*Romeo and Juliet* (Quarto, 1597).

*Romeo and Juliet* is based upon a translation into English verse of a novel by Bandello, the *Romeus and Juliet* (1562) of Arthur Brooke; but although Shakespeare follows the order of events as given in the poem very closely, he leaves the phraseology of his original severely alone.[1] This is an ardent and beautiful play of youthful idealism. The hearts of the lovers beat beneath a veil of euphuistic preciosity,[2] but the ardour and freshness of their love is

[1] No doubt Shakespeare also met with the story in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, 1566. The *Novella* of Bandello had appeared in 1584.

[2] There is a great deal in the play that reminds us of Lyly and there are reflexions, also, of Marlowe and Kyd. In *The Jew of Malta* (II. i.) occur the lines:

> 'But stay! what star shines yonder in the East?
> The loadstar of my life':

see *Romeo and Juliet* (II. ii.). And, strangely enough, the Nurse's

immortal.[1] The elements of romanticism and euphuism mix throughout and are fused in the character of Mercutio. In the beautiful farewell scene (III. v.), in the Nurse scenes, in the balcony scene, and in the Mercutio death-scene, Shakespeare forgets to be euphuistic; but Juliet's lamentations (III. ii.) are an extreme example of the playing with words that occurs throughout the play, and are as affected as the exquisite foppery of the Queen Mab speech. The play forms a link between the first and second groups, but belongs to the second rather than to the first, because, while tragic in idea, it is almost wholly free from the influence of Marlowe, and because in it humour becomes for the first time an element of great importance. The Nurse has more actuality than any previous figure. She occurs in Brooke's poem, but Mercutio is an invention of Shakespeare.

*King John* (1623).

*King John* is based upon a Marlowesque chronicle play in two parts, entitled *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, which appeared in 1591. Shakespeare compressed this older play into five acts and rewrote the whole of it, though he reproduces its general plan. *King John* shows an advance in characterization as compared with the earlier historical dramas. If there is no figure equal in interest to that of the King in *Richard II.*, yet on the whole the characters are more vigorously and clearly detached from the scene than those of that play or of *Richard III.* Though Arthur is somewhat conventionally handled, there is more truth in the pathos of the famous scene with Hubert than in the lamentations of Richard II. But the play is declamatory

lines: 'O love, O life, not life but love in death,' etc., are a parody of lines in *The Spanish Tragedie*.

[1] 'No one,' said Tennyson, speaking of this play, 'has drawn the true passion of love like Shakespeare.'

and rhetorical rather than impassioned or poetic. There is a suggestion that the wrongs and woes of Constance were intended to form a tragic core to the drama; but fine as her rhetoric is, Constance is monotonously violent, unimpassioned, and unconvincing. Actually, therefore, the play has no centre of interest and no unity, and at very few points does it seem to have obtained complete hold of Shakespeare's imagination. A noteworthy point is the omission of any reference to the Great Charter, a point amusingly emphasized in a recent 'revival.'

*Merchant of Venice* (Quartos, 1600).

The main plot of *The Merchant of Venice* is a tissue of absurdities derived from a long-winded romance of an Arabian type, which Capell discovered in the Fourth Day of *Il Pecorone*, a collection of stories written in emulation of the *Decameron* by the Florentine, Ser Giovanni. The subsidiary tale of the Caskets is drawn from the mediæval anecdote book, the *Gesta Romanorum*. The two stories are knit together through the agency of Bassanio, but without the least regard to circumstantial plausibility. The casket-will and the legal procedure in Act IV. belong properly to the realm of comic opera. Yet of all the plays Shakespeare had so far written none is so full of actuality and none is so graceful. Most remarkable is the extraordinary figure of Shylock. In comparison with this, Marlowe's Barabas is a vulgar and conventional conception.[1] Shakespeare represents his Jew as a man perverted to a base malignity by a just sense of racial wrong. This sense of wrong is central in Shylock: his avarice and even his malice are only secondary. It is

[1] There is really nothing in common between Barabas and Shylock. Their avarice and their hatred of Christians are unlike. It may be noted in passing that nothing could be more unlike Marlowe than the exquisite fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice*.

significant of Shakespeare's artistic freedom that he should have represented him otherwise than as merely hateful. Shylock is the first great Shakespearean character, the first really tragic figure the poet created, the first of his great acting parts after Richard III.[1] But none of the other figures in the play are fully realized. Interest in the love story is sadly diminished by the fact that it is difficult to regard Bassanio as other than a needy adventurer whose main purpose is 'to get clear of all the debts he owes.' It was not Shakespeare's intention to represent him thus; but his relations with Portia and with Antonio alike are carelessly handled. Yet the fifth act marks the highest point Shakespeare had yet reached in pure comedy.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* (Quartos, 1600).

The gossamer texture of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* is woven from Shakespeare's own imagination. No source has been discovered for the plot.[2] The scene is laid in Arcadia, which opens into fairy-land. It might be called a pastoral poem: almost all the speeches and incidents might have formed part of a pastoral by Spenser or Drayton. But even in Spenser we look in vain for such justness of fancy and phrasing. As a whole the play is unique, and not one of Shakespeare's

[1] It is nevertheless possible that, with Shylock, Shakespeare may have intentionally exploited the excited curiosity aroused in England during the summer of 1594, by the hanging at Tyburn of the Jewish physician of Elizabeth, Lopez, on a doubtful charge of conspiring to poison the Queen.

[2] Shakespeare apparently took some names from Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*, and one from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. Oberon, king of the fairies, comes into Greene's *James IV*. Pyramus and Thisbe and the name Titania are from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Stratford folk lore and perhaps Stratford performances might have suggested the fairies and clowns. Puck or Robin Goodfellow is an old English character. (See Sikes, *British Goblins*, chap. ii.)

dramas is a more perfectly harmonious whole. It is the first of his plays which from the first scene, in which Hermia is given her choice between marriage with Demetrius and

> 'living a barren sister all her life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon,'

to the last, in which the fairies dance at midnight in Theseus' palace, is unmistakably a work of genius. In no other writer is to be found such a combination as that of the majesty of Theseus, made up of courtesy, wisdom, and consciousness of strength, the rude drolleries of the clowns, and the exquisite purged earthliness of the fairies. The unreality of the love story is no flaw; passion would here be grotesquely out of place.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is merely a Shakespearean version of a play entitled *The Taming of a Shrew*, published in 1594. Shakespeare recast and greatly improved the older play and added the uninteresting episode of Bianca and Lucentio, which is taken with very little alteration from Gascoigne's *Supposes*. Apart from its 'go' and good humour, the fine swagger of Petruchio, and the brilliant Induction, it is a boisterous farce of relatively little merit.[1]

*Taming of the Shrew* (1623).

The two parts of *Henry IV.* and the play of *Henry V.* are based upon the chronicle of Holinshed, supplemented by a wretched old play called *The Famous Victories of Henry V.* Shakespeare's play of *Henry V.* can be referred

[1] The story of the 'taming' is a very ancient tale of almost universal currency; and the trick played upon Sly is at least as old as the *Arabian Nights*. A curious point is that Shakespeare has placed the inn out of which Christopher Sly was bundled in the neighbourhood of Stratford and added local names both of places and persons. The tables are amusingly if coarsely turned on Petruchio by a second wife in Fletcher's *Tamer Tam'd* of 1611.

with certainty to the winter of 1598-9, and *Henry IV.* to the preceding twelvemonth. Together these plays form an epic, rising at its close to an apotheosis of English might and achievement. *Henry V.* is informed throughout by the pride of England. It is a patriotic triumph drama—the only play of Shakespeare written in the spirit of John of Gaunt's dying outburst in *Richard II.*, or the moral given to Prince Henry by Falconbridge:

*1 Henry IV.* (Quarto, 1598).
*2 Henry IV.* (Quarto, 1600).

> 'Naught shall make us rue,
> If England to itself do rest but true.'

As a whole these plays show a marked advance in dramatic power, knowledge of life, characterization, and creative humour.[1] Constructively, they stand far above any previous play save the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The splendid swinging march of the drama is not interrupted, but is freed from monotony by the masterly insertion of the underplot. The detachment, the vitality of all the principal and many of the minor figures, is unequalled in any earlier play. Thus in this trilogy no more splendid rhetoric is to be found, even in Shakespeare. A comparison of the heroic and martial blank verse of *Henry V.* with the lyric verse of *Midsummer Night's Dream* will show the immense flexibility and power with which Shakespeare already wielded his instrument. As regards Falstaff, the language of mere eulogy is out of place. The height of Shakespeare's creative humour is reached here. It is a supreme expression of Shakespeare's joy in life. Falstaff is one of the greatest creations of world-literature, or if this be not so, if his appeal is less universal than

*Henry V.* (Quarto, 1600).

[1] The scene in which Mrs. Quickly has Falstaff arrested touches the highest point of pure comedy.

that of Don Quixote, it is only because he is so entirely English.[1]

When Shakespeare wrote *Henry V.*, it was anticipated by his public that they were to renew their acquaintance with Falstaff, but in this they were disappointed. Queen Elizabeth, so a strong tradition says, took up their grievance, and expressed a wish to see Falstaff in love. Whereupon Shakespeare produced *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which is in point of style the most colloquial of his plays, in the space of a fortnight.[2] It is impossible to reconcile the characters with their counterparts in *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.* The *Merry Wives* was written, it is true, to fill an unhistorical gap between these two dramas; but, as might be expected in the case of a sequel written to order in a hurry, the characters which had been constructed for high comedy are often hardly more than recognizable when submitted to the changed conditions of a broad and homely, but thoroughly genial and highly diverting farce.

*Merry Wives* (Quarto, 1602).

The chronological position of *As You Like It*[3] may be

The four plays *Richard II.*, *Henry IV.*, Parts I. and II., and *Henry V.*) seem to have been designed, as Dr. Johnson pointed out, to form a connected historical series. But though following each other in historical order, artistically a wide interval separates *Richard II.* from the three plays that follow. In *King John* Shakespeare had already ventured to introduce an element of humour into the grave and stately march of an historical drama, and this attains its greatest strength in 1 *Henry IV.*

[2] The printed 'tradition' dates from 1702 (Dennis). Hints for the tricks played upon Falstaff by the 'merry' wives may derive from 'Tale of the Two Lovers of Pisa' in *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie*, 1590, the original being in the *Notte* of Straparola (1569). The Folio version is nearly twice as long as the Quarto, which may be either a mutilated sketch of the play or a condensed early draft.

[3] Entered in 'Stationers Register,' 1600, but though licensed apparently not printed before 1623.

*As You Like It* (1623).

referred with something like certainty to the space between the publication of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (from which Shakespeare borrows a line) in 1598 and the production of *Twelfth Night* early in 1601-2. 'Under the Greenwood Tree' is the dominant note of the play, and its original theme one of the old English legends, such as Greene had delighted to use in *The Pinner of Wakefield. The Tale of Gamelyn* was a fourteenth-century story with an outlaw hero of the Robin Hood ballad type; Lodge associated this homely native product with the graces of the conventional Renaissance pastoral in his *Rosalynde* of 1590. Shakespeare adopted the incidents of Lodge's novel with few changes, though in the midst of the novelist's Arcadia he has set the irony of Jaques and Touchstone, and alongside of the conventional Silvius and Phebe the comic rusticity of Audrey.[1] A pastoral poem of surpassing lyrical richness, which has more in common structurally with *Midsummer Night's Dream* than with such a comedy as *Much Ado*, *As You Like It* is yet far removed from the earlier work by its pervasive irony. The lambent wit of Rosalind, the more acid vein of Touchstone, whose motley is always at hand to 'resolve wisdom's white ray into the prismatic colours of folly,' reveal the dramatist in one of his most sportive moods; yet in Jaques and the Duke new notes of a graver import are struck. As in *What You Will*, the ending of *As You Like It* is not laboured to a semblance of probability. It is rather that

[1] Cf. Armado and Jaquenetta in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Jaques, Touchstone, and Audrey are all characters of Shakespeare's invention, and owe nothing to Lodge. Details for Charles the Wrestler and for Touchstone's remarks upon the varieties of Lie (V. iv.) were borrowed from the book of the celebrated fencer, *Saviolo, his Practice* (1595).

of a child's fairy tale: how else should things end in the Forest of Arden?

That with the close of the century Shakespeare's humorous and constructive power was approaching its zenith is strongly evidenced by the next two comedies.

*Much Ado* (Quarto, 1600).

*Much Ado About Nothing*, unsurpassed in dialogue and in the interplay of character, is one of the brightest of all comedies, and one of the most finely balanced. Its brightness is not derived from its plot, which is indeed of a somewhat gloomy character. The story of Don Pedro and his friend Claudio, and the latter's love for the daughter of Leonato, is told in the twenty-second of the Novels of Matteo Bandello.[1] The intrigue is as unpromising for a comedy as that of *All's Well*; but Shakespeare treats the tragic element very lightly. The outrageous conduct of Claudio at the altar only postpones the nuptials from the fourth act to the fifth, and the conclusion of the whole matter is —simply, *Much Ado About Nothing*. The title seems, in fact, almost more ironical than that of *All's Well that Ends Well*. In both plays the evil agency of the plot is traceable to a stage villain, and in both alike Shakespeare drew the cruel and selfish young gallant of the period without any idealizing touches. Claudio and Ber-

[1] A somewhat modified version is given in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (vol. iii.). A play called a 'Historie of Ariodante and Genevora shewed before her Matie on Shrove-tuesdaie at night enacted by Mr Mulcasters children' (1583), based upon a scene in the *Orlando* of Ariosto, may have given Shakespeare the idea of Hero's personation by Margaret (cf. *Faerie Queene*, II. iv. 16). Among the Comedies *Much Ado* resembles the *Merry Wives* in the large proportion of prose. The pure comicality and dense good humour of Dogberry have been equalled only by Dickens. The constables and headboroughs were as much a subject of merriment in Shakespeare's day as they were later in those of Fielding.

tram are both distinguished for bravery; only Claudio's selfishness is of a more cubbish and ungenerous kind even than that of Bertram. The portraits of both these young warriors, of 'crack regiments' no doubt, are so lifelike as to suggest that they were drawn *ad vivum*. The intellectual atmosphere of the play is created by the delightful wit-combats between Benedick and Beatrice, an importation of Shakespeare's own. The play drew full houses (as Leonard Digges informs us) under its popular title of *Benedick and Beatrice*. Benedick is a shrewd and kindly man of the world, superficially affected; Beatrice, a young Renaissance damsel, brilliantly educated, flashing with sharp wit, beautiful and unabashed, the sunshine of her uncle Leonato's house, is almost, if not quite, the most attractive of all Shakespeare's heroines. There is nothing in all comedy more brilliant than the interplay of these two. The pair had begun to take an interest in each other when the play begins, but the barbed wit of Beatrice had piqued Master Benedick's self-esteem rather more than he cared to admit, while Beatrice had conceived a dislike for the airs, especially the woman-hating airs, that the gentleman gave himself. The way in which Shakespeare converts their mutual irritation into the basis of a real and lasting affection is a triumph of art. The supposed discovery that Benedick is consumed by a passion for her develops Beatrice from a saucy girl, 'in whose eyes disdain and scorn ride sparkling,' into a woman. The wrong done to her cousin Hero brings out all the fine and generous elements in her nature. When Hero's own father accepts her guilt as proven, when Claudio without a doubt or a touch of remorse consigns her to shame, when the friar remains silent, and the generous Benedick himself knows not what to say, Beatrice alone, whose wit is acknowledged to be as shrewd

as her heart is generous, instinctively and without a moment's hesitation rebuts the foul charge:

'Oh, on my soul, my cousin is belied!'

Benedick is successfully spurred to champion the cause of injured innocence. But as soon as ever the dark sky of trouble is cleared, Beatrice recovers her gayest spirits and is eager for fresh victories in the 'merry war' between herself and 'Signior Montanto.' 'I yield to your love,' she says, 'only upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption.' But Benedick knows that he has won her heart, and that it is a heart of gold.[1]

*Twelfth Night* (1623).

The animation of the whole comedy, the blended harmony of prose and verse, the skilful arrangement of light and shade, and alternation of lively, tender, and severe, are only surpassed in *Twelfth Night*, the brightest, the most playable, and the most humorous—or, let us say, in one word, with Halliwell, 'the perfection of English comedy.' The fable is again drawn from Bandello, but the story had been dramatized at Siena in 1531 in a clever coterie comedy called *Gl' Ingannati*.

[1] It would almost seem as if in the consciousness of the supreme craft that he had at length attained in light comedy, Shakespeare resolved to retrace in firmer outline a number of his earlier and more tentative sketches of character. Thus, in Benedick he may be said to develop his youthful conception of Biron. In Dogberry, Dull is retouched by the creator of Bottom. Among Dogberry's relatives in later plays we discern Elbow and the second gravedigger. Friar Francis speaks in tones very similar to those of the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. While Scott's heroes are virtuously dull, Shakespeare's often show a lack of fine gentlemanly sensibility, and in this respect Claudio resembles Proteus (cf. Bertram and Posthumus). The sharp-tongued Maria in *Twelfth Night* has been termed a 'Beatrice Below Stairs.'

and repeated in Barnabe Rich's 1581 collection of Italian tales. The story is wholly transformed by Shakespeare's touch. In no play is Shakespeare's broad and genial sympathy with human nature, in its weaknesses, better seen. The bullying parasite[1] and the zany, the pompous fatuity of the major domo, the kittenish vivacity of Maria, and the caustic fooling of Feste create an atmosphere rich in almost transcendental fun. It is an unrivalled group of comic figures. The courtly scenes, with the musical duke and the stately Olivia, are bejewelled with ingenious dialogue and matchless lyric, and this marvellous wealth of life makes us forget altogether the slenderness and repetition of the plot.

*All's Well that Ends Well* (1623).

The comedy of *All's Well that Ends Well* is a great triumph of composition. Shakespeare takes an intrigue of fantastic and semi-oriental type,[2] furnishes it with European characters, and decorates it with English clownage and courtly wit; yet the result is not an incongruous patchwork, but a fascinating scenic spectacle. The plot is a fanciful imbroglio, and the situations, even

[1] Sir Toby has some affinities with Falstaff; his excuse about drinking healths is quite in the fat knight's vein. After Sir John, the 'affectioned ass' Malvolio is said to have been one of the best 'draws' on the Elizabethan stage:

> 'The Cockpit, Galleries, Boxes, all are full,
> To hear Malvoglio, that cross-gartered Gull.'

[2] *Nov.* 9, *Giorn.* iii. of the *Decamcron*, englished in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, 1566, Pt. I., novell. 38. The novel ends by Gilletta taking her sons and the ring and throwing herself upon Beltramo's honourable clemency. Yet it must be said that the story reads much more plausibly in the novel than in the drama, which is, however, an excellent acting play. The play was first printed in the Folio of 1623. There is no division into scenes, and the text is far from satisfactory.

when they seem most threatening, have no more reality than arabesques; to regard the characters too seriously is merely to court delusion. As stage parts they are beautifully finished. Bertram is the froward, aristocratic blood, just as Shakespeare saw him at Court; a masculine beauty, predestined to *bonnes fortunes*, not encumbered with heart, but pre-eminently brave, and certainly not intended by Shakespeare to appear odious. The dramatist was, in fact, as lenient as Dame Fortune to gallant and fascinating young men, who, after all, whatever their moral defects, make admirable figures in comedy. Lafeu is a delightful old courtier, ripe, accomplished and kindly—the confidant of all. The Countess is, as Mrs. Jameson says, 'one of Titian's old ladies, reminding us still amid their wrinkles of that soul of beauty and sensibility which must have animated them when young.' Parolles is an admirable comic figure with something of Pistol, less of Falstaff, more of Jonson's Bobadill or the Bessus of *A King and No King*. Helena, if not quite consistently realized, is a very woman: the skill with which Shakespeare precludes any doubt as to the essential purity of her nature, despite the ugly situations in which she is placed, is one of the miracles of his art.

As we postponed treating *Romeo and Juliet* until the conclusion of the first group of plays, so we have deferred speaking of *All's Well* until the close of the second or comedy period. The date of its composition forms in truth one of the knottiest problems of Shakespearean chronology. In some respects it seems almost as early as the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in others almost as late as *Measure for Measure*. The rhyming discourse between Helena and the King (II. i.) is distinctly juvenile. In the previous scene with the Countess the heroine sounds a deeper note. The repartee in many places suggests play-

wright Lyly and the witty interchange of that school classic, the *Colloquia* of Erasmus, much more than the exquisite badinage of *Much Ado*. The clown is a puzzling intermediary between Launce and Speed on the one hand, and Touchstone and Feste on the other. There is little that is youthful either in the sentiment or rhythm of the Countess's parting words to Bertram:

> 'Love all, trust a few,
> Do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy
> Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend
> Under thy own life's key.'

And Parolles:—his acquiescence in the shameful exposure of his cowardice in 'Yet I am thankful . . .'! This is not less wonderful in its reach than Falstaff upon his repudiation by the new King Hal,[1] 'Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound.' It is probable that the play represents a comparatively early work retouched. It looks as though, some years after he had written the comedy in its original form, Shakespeare had been struck by the seriousness of the issues suggested rather than raised, and that in his revision his interest in this more serious aspect of the plot had modified the scenes with the Countess and the character of Helena.

The suggestion that early workmanship is overlaid by later revision in this play is strengthened by the fact that its plot is drawn from the same source[2] as *Romeo and Juliet*, which is dated about 1594-5; while if the play

[1] Truly, as Charles Kingsley said, 'there are moods of man which no one will dare to describe unless, like Shakespeare, he is Shakespeare, and like Shakespeare knows it not' (*Hereward*).

[2] It was taken immediately from Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566), the great storehouse of tales from Boccaccio and the later Italian novellieri.

were the original *Love's Labour's Won* spoken of by Meres (as there is excellent reason to suppose), the change of name would seem to indicate revision subsequent to 1598. The interpolated work may have been as late as 1601-2; but for all this it seems to us a complete mistake to dissociate *All's Well* from the *Florial* period of Shakespearean comedy. The way in which a painful theme is circumvented reminds one most decisively of *Much Ado*. The gaiety outgoes the gloom. Tragic issues are suggested, but are slurred over. The *dénouement* is pure Perrault, and we are assured at the cost of some violence to our innermost convictions that '*All's Well*.'

## § 4. *Tragedy.*

The period of Shakespeare's absolute maturity of thought and style is marked by a curiously abrupt transition to tragic themes. After *Much Ado* and *Twelfth Night* comes a succession of tragedies, broken only by the irony of *Troilus and Cressida* and the speculation of *Measure for Measure*. The contrast between the plays of this period (*Julius Cæsar* to *Coriolanus*[1]) and those of the preceding period is the more strongly marked, because until *Julius Cæsar* Shakespeare had written no tragedy, save in the Marlowesque or romantic sense. That from about 1600 to 1609 his mind was preoccupied with the tragedy of life is certain. To assert that his persistent selection of tragic

[1] The following are, as before, approximate dates of composition and production:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Julius Cæsar* . . . . | 1601 | *Macbeth* . . . . . | 1605-6 |
| *Hamlet* . . . . . | 1602 | *King Lear* . . . . . | 1606 |
| *Troilus and Cressida* . . | 1603* | *Timon of Athens* . . | 1607-8* |
| *Measure for Measure* . | 1603-4 | *Antony and Cleopatra* . | 1608 |
| *Othello* . . . . . | 1604 | *Coriolanus* . . . . . | 1609* |

themes in those years was unconnected with his own personal inner life, that he turned to tragedy simply because he thought it would pay, and kept to it simply because it actually did pay, would be to assert a psychological absurdity. To insist that his choice of such themes must have had some relation to the externals or mere circumstances of his life would be at least equally presumptuous. It is, nevertheless, quite probable that considerations of demand and supply to some extent determined the character of Shakespeare's work in these years.

A few essential features, positive and negative, of the tragedy of Shakespeare may be observed. It is invariably a tragedy of weakness. There is no instance in it of the struggle of a strong man against overwhelming circumstance, or the struggle of a good man against overwhelming evil. In his tragedies, the ruin of the hero is in every case the consequence of his own weakness or follies. In no single instance does his fall result from his own nobility of character or purpose. Every one of the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies is a weak man. Even Coriolanus is weak by reason of absolute lack of self-control. Lear, though more of a victim than anything else, has an ill-balanced mind, and owes his fate to an act of egregious folly. Hamlet, the highest spirit of them all, fails least. He, at least in a fashion, does his work.

Nor is the theme of Shakespearean tragedy in any case a moral struggle against what is called temptation. There is no such struggle in Macbeth or Antony, for neither hero has more than a rudimentary conscience. Hamlet doubts of his duty, as he well might, but in him there is no question of a choice between known good and known evil. The themes chosen are not ethical in any distinctive sense.

Love plays but a small part in Shakespearean tragedy. With *Julius Cæsar*, *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, *Lear* and *Timon*,

it has nothing to do. In *Hamlet* it is very subordinate. Even *Othello* is not a tragedy of love: that is, the catastrophe does not arise from the love but from Othello's immoral credulity. Only *Antony and Cleopatra* is a tragedy of love: and even there one is made to feel that Antony would have thrown himself away and fallen before Octavius though Cleopatra had never existed.

It would be rash to draw very positive conclusions from these facts, but they are suggestive. Shakespeare was an idealistic artist, but he lived in the centre of the actual. The tragedy of moral struggle, or of heroic failure, or of love are rare things comparatively, but the tragedy of weakness is everywhere.

The tragedy of mere weakness, however, is apt to be sordid. It is never so with Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespeare's tragic heroes, though they are none of them heroic, are all finely or even splendidly endowed. Every one of them has great qualities, and most of them are men of great intellect. Coriolanus, Antony, Hamlet, even Lear, are all men of commanding intellect; men whose intellect is beyond that of the common man of genius.

If Shakespeare had died in the year 1600, we should know him as a great poet, a great humorist, a great artist, hardly to be matched in the realization of character, and the greatest of all dramatists. We should not know him as he revealed himself in the following years, as the greatest of all poets who have dealt with human life, as the poet of universal humanity, supreme, solitary, omnipotent.

*Julius Caesar* (1623).

*Julius Caesar* is founded on the life of Caesar in North's *Plutarch*, to the phraseology of which Shakespeare adhered closely in many places; but there is no trace in *Plutarch* (beyond a mention of the fact that he spoke) of Mark Antony's oration,

the greatest piece of popular oratory on record. The play was a new departure both in subject and style; it may fairly be called the first Shakespearean tragedy, since *Romeo and Juliet* was romantic rather than tragic, and *Richard III.* was tragic only in the Marlowesque sense. Splendidly though it is written, the play is rather faultily constructed. The disappearance of Caesar produces something like an anti-climax. The real weakness lies in the position of Brutus, who, though heroic, is a dupe. Othello too is a dupe, but in Othello we have the working of elemental passions with which we can all sympathize; Brutus, we feel, was on the wrong side. Shakespeare seems to have been in two minds about Caesar: he could not wholly sympathize with a regicide, nor could he bring himself to distort Caesar into a tyrant.[1] The diction of the play is more lucid than that of any later Shakespearean drama. The text is a singularly good one.

A play on the story of Hamlet existed in 1589. Shakespeare's play was first acted in 1602. The story of the play appears in the *Histoires Tragiques* (vol. v.) of Belleforest, who adapted it from the *Historia Danica* (*c.* 1180) of Saxo Grammaticus. Little more than a rough outline of the story was obtained from this source. Two quartos appeared, the first a rough and imperfect version (embodying, in all likelihood, fragments of the old play of *Hamlet's Revenge*, conjecturally ascribed to Kyd), probably piratical, in 1603, and the second an undoubtedly authorized version in 1604. The version given in the folio of

[1] As usual, Shakespeare hesitated to depart from his historical authority, and though he represented Caesar as intoxicated with success, 'his wisdom is consumed in confidence,' he makes no attempt to place him before us as a legitimate object of hatred. He *may* have been influenced by a non-extant play of *Julius Caesar* produced by his own theatrical company in 1594.

1623 differs from both of these, and is a good deal longer. The *textus receptus* is based upon a combination of the folio and second quarto versions.

In this tragedy we have a far greater concentration of interest than in any previous play, with the exception of *Richard III.*, and a corresponding completeness of organic unity, separating it decisively from the earlier charming or splendid medleys and even from *Julius Caesar*. Every incident and personage is related to Hamlet. We see almost nothing of the King, or Queen, or Ophelia, except so far as they concern him. There is, for the first time, a complete fusion of poetry and life. Hamlet's soliloquies are not comments upon incidents; they are the drama itself. Hamlet's mind is the theme, and the incidents serve merely to modulate its reflexions. It were useless to speak in brief of the philosophy of a play which confounds the philosophers, or of the astonishing reality which captivates the ordinary playgoer; though it may perhaps be suggested that it is the play of Shakespeare in which the supreme dramatic craft and the supreme poetic power are most completely balanced. So it comes about that a drama almost entirely of thought still holds the stage even more triumphantly than any other of Shakespeare's plays.[1]

*Hamlet* (Quartos, 1603, 1604).

[1] The keynote is struck in the opening scene, which thrills the audience with a sense of foreboding, while the Shakespearean note of Nature's recuperative force is struck firmly at the close. In the last two acts some signs of hastier work are apparent, though it is noteworthy that the gravediggers' scene, which was cited by Voltaire and other eighteenth-century critics as an instance of Shakespeare's grossness and vulgarity of conception, is now admitted by all discriminating critics to constitute a genuine triumph of artistic effect. 'Hamlet,' says Tennyson, 'is the greatest creation in literature that I know of.' The popular appreciation of more extraneous features of the play, such as the lecture of Polonius

*Troilus and Cressida* was apparently acted in 1603. Its theme was perhaps suggested to Shakespeare by a lost play by Dekker and Chettle, bearing the same title (1599-1600); but the only known sources are Chaucer's *Troilus and Cresseid* and Lydgate's *Troy Booke*.[1] Shakespeare's Cressid, however, is wholly unlike her of the older writers. There are two strange things about this magnificently written but chaotic drama. In the first place it is completely lacking in the unity which the dramatist had just achieved in *Hamlet*. There is no centre of interest and no logical development. The story of Troilus and Cressida is only an episode, and the play ends with the death of Hector, a still more episodical personage. In the second place, as a fitting adjunct to much political wisdom, there is a strong element of cynicism, very much stronger than in any other Shakespearean play. The youthful love of Troilus is based upon pure illusion; Cressida, the object of it, is a perfectly drawn light-o'-love; while the commentary is supplied by Pandarus. Ajax is depicted as a butt, and the play ends with the apotheosis of the brute, Achilles.[2] It is supposed by some authorities that in this play Shakespeare took up

*Troilus and Cressida* (Quarto, 1609).

or Hamlet's advice to the players, in which are topical allusions to conflict going on at the time between adult and boy actors, is shown by the fact that every other line in them has become a proverbial saying. The picturesque machinery of the play within a play may be noted as an Italian device which had already been used by Kyd (in *The Spanish Tragedie*) and other writers.

[1] Shakespeare may also have read the early portions of Chapman's *Homer*, and possibly Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*.

[2] The Greek heroes, Ajax and Achilles, look at first sight as if they were intended as an antidote to all hero-worship; but in this Shakespeare was merely following the Latin mediaeval tradition. Hector was one of the nine worthies and was always depicted as a

the cudgels for the romantic drama against the assaults of Ben Jonson; that he caricatured Marston as Thersites and Jonson as Ajax. The evidence seems to point rather to the conclusion that Shakespeare, though his view of the drama was certainly not that of Jonson, took no definite side in the semi-burlesque 'Poeto-machia' of 1601.

It is not denied that Shakespeare had good-natured thrusts now and again at such writers as Marlowe, Kyd, Lyly, and others, and it is possible that he may have intended to burlesque as Dull the heavy-handed Anthony Munday. Quite possibly again, he may have aimed a shaft at Marston, the Lenville of the Elizabethan stage-fraternity, who was moreover a perfect Ishmael without permanent ties, continually oscillating between gross scurrility and absurd rodomontade. But if he satirized him at all it is much more likely that he did so as Pistol than as Thersites. Such evidence as there is inclines us, very willingly, to the belief that Shakespeare took rather an Olympian view of these playwright squabbles. By an audience suspicious of covert insult certain lines in *Troilus and Cressida* may easily have been taken to glance upon the classicism of such writers as Jonson and Chapman; but had Shakespeare deliberately gone out of his way to insult Jonson (in the very manner which Jonson resented so persistently in the case of Marston), we cannot believe that Jonson would ever have spoken of him later, as he almost invariably did, namely, as a very great if slightly erratic genius.

hero, while Achilles was drawn as a mean and cowardly rascal. The succession of the mediaeval Troy legend is most admirably traced by M. Paul Stapfer, who regards the cynical passages in *Troilus and Cressida* in the light of a recreation for the dramatist after serious work upon the tragedies. If you wish to know Shakespeare's utter freedom of thought, said Goethe, read this play.

*Measure for Measure* (1623).

The original story of *Measure for Measure* is in Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. George Whetstone founded a play upon it in 1578,[1] and translated the whole story in his *Heptameron* of 1582. Shakespeare, however, profoundly modified the story; in the original the ending is tragic and somewhat resembles that of Sardou's well-known *La Tosca*. Shakespeare spares us the mere brutality of such an ending, but only by employing a device both ugly and absurd.[2] The several situations as they arise are magnificently treated, and there is perhaps nothing finer in Shakespeare than the scene between Angelo and Isabella. The comic scenes are full of life, while, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, the 'gnomic' or sententious element is very strong.[3] The assignment of the play along with *Troilus and Cressida* to this period (1603-4) of Shakespeare's dramatic progress is generally adopted, though it presents difficulties of no ordinary kind, for it seems to indicate a strange careless-

[1] Named *Promos and Cassandra*. Cinthio also wrote a tragedy on the subject called *Epitia* (untranslated).

[2] That of the substitution of Mariana for Isabella. Shakespeare had already used this preposterous device in *All's Well* (cf. *The Changeling*, p. 177). Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare foists a happy ending upon a tragic story. The plot of *Measure for Measure* is still further marred by the thinness of the Duke's disguise. The Duke's part is of quite exceptional length.

[3] Insistence on the beauty of chastity is combined with ironical treatment of attempts to enforce it by law. The humour of *Measure for Measure* is of the ripest—so ripe in fact as to be almost rotten. Elbow, another comic constable, is never stale. The ex-bawd Pompey, who is set to learn the mystery of Jack Ketch, is a droll dog. Best of all is the good-humoured and witty, but lying and irrepressible rake, Lucio, who sticks 'like a burr' to the disguised duke, and insists upon telling him impossible libels about the supposed absentee, that 'old fantastical duke of dark corners.'

ness as regards construction in the interval between the production of two of the greatest stage masterpieces, *Hamlet* and *Othello*. The difficulty is only increased by putting the date further back, and is not greatly diminished if, at the risk of some injury to such external evidence as we possess, we put these plays later.

*Othello* (Quarto, 1622).

*Othello* was acted before James I. at Whitehall on November 1st, 1604. The story was in all probability taken directly from the same source as *Measure for Measure*, namely, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (Decade 3, Novella 7, *Un Capitano Moro*). In this play Shakespeare again attained the complete unity of high tragedy. The concentration of interest is as great as in *Hamlet*, and the subordination of the exquisite figure of Desdemona is even more complete than that of Ophelia.[1] In other respects *Othello* contrasts strongly with *Hamlet*. Far more simple in plan and

[1] In general, as is the case with most of Shakespeare's women, we lose sight of her personal charms in her attachment and devotedness to her husband. Love strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave, is the theme of *Othello*, which is, in Macaulay's opinion, 'perhaps the greatest work in the world.'

Of the four great tragedies, in Hazlitt's opinion, *Lear* stands first for the profound intensity of passion; *Macbeth* for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of the action; *Othello* for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling; *Hamlet* for the refined development of thought. Of the next play, *Macbeth*, he says finely: 'It has the rugged severity of an old chronicle with all that the imagination of the poet can engraft upon traditional belief. The castle of Macbeth round which "the air smells wooingly," and where "the temple-haunting martlet builds," has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on the blasted heath (Shakespeare excelled in the openings of his plays; that of *Macbeth* is the finest of any) . . . all that passed thro' the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle, through ours.' After portraying Revenge and Jealousy Shakespeare depicts the truly appalling 'Tragedy of Sleep.'

direct in treatment, it is perhaps the most purely realistic of all Shakespeare's plays. A tragedy of primitive passion, its appeal is almost wholly to the primal emotions.[1] So terribly real is it, so cruel is 'the pity of it,' that the last act is almost unbearable. Northcote, an ardent lover of Shakespeare, never dared to read it. The fault of the play lies in the fact that Othello has no moral right to conviction. Yet he has more right than Claudio (in *Much Ado*), far more than Posthumus, and *a fortiori* more than the hardly sane Leontes. A little closer questioning of Emilia, however, would have brought out the truth; and this fact concerns Iago's conduct as well as Othello's.

*Macbeth* (1623).

The tragedy of *Macbeth* was first printed in the folio of 1623, and the text, as is so often the case with plays that are based upon no extant quarto version, is very corrupt (compare *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*, but more especially *Coriolanus*). It was written in all probability about 1606, and the dramatist seems to have gone out of his way to pay a compliment to the Scottish monarch, who had first made formal entry into London on March 15th, 1604.[2] The received text has

[1] The character of Iago, however, is a study of extraordinary intellectual interest. In Cinthio his original motive is jealousy of the Moor. The *dénouement* is transformed in a masterly way by Shakespeare, who also creates the parts of Brabantio and Roderigo.

[2] Sympathy is lavished on James's ancestor Banquo; while Macbeth's vision of kings who carry twofold balls and treble sceptres (IV. i. 120) clearly symbolizes the union of Scotland with England and Ireland under James. The story is derived from Holinshed's *Chronicle of Scottish History*, with indirect reference, perhaps, to earlier Scots sources, and an occasional hint from Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Holinshed, in fact, follows Hector Boece, 1526, and Boece, Fordun. Shakespeare deviates considerably from Holinshed; and with the exception of Duncan's murder, in which Macbeth was concerned either as principal or accessory, and the character of Lady Macbeth, there is hardly any

much the appearance of a quarto cut down for temporary stage exigencies.

In this play the concentration of interest is even greater than in *Hamlet* or *Othello*. Macbeth and his wife might almost be called the only characters: all the rest are pale beside them except the Witches—demonic beings these, without any real relation to the witches of popular belief, such as 'Mother Bombie.' By reason of this concentration, and by reason of the hurry of events, the tragic note is here more absolutely dominant than in any other Shakespearean drama. Except for the introduction of the Porter (a stroke of genius) after the terrific scene of the murder, there is hardly a touch of humour. The keynote of this, the most picturesque, the most lurid and fiercely rapid of all tragedies, is struck in the first scene by a miracle of imagination, and maintained to the end in spite of inequalities.[1] A storm of fear blows through the short five acts. Macbeth's imagination appals him; he struggles

point in which the drama coincides with the real history. Almost the only point upon which historians agree is that the reign of Macbeth was one of remarkable prosperity and vigorous government. A vindication of Macbeth may be read in Robertson's *Scotland under her Early Kings*. But what chance has truth against Shakespeare? See Anatole France, *L'Anneau d'Améthyste*, 202-203.

[1] The play is exceptionally unequal. The scene of the wounded soldier (I. ii.) is feeble and inartistic, and possibly not Shakespeare's, though 'where the Norweyan banners flout the sky' has an unmistakable sound. The passage in which Malcolm attributes to himself, alternately, all the vices and all the virtues (IV. iii.) is somewhat pointless and feeble. While the brevity (the play has only 1,993 lines as against 3,924 in *Hamlet*) and abruptness of the play have given rise to the suspicion that we possess only an imperfect transcript of an acting version, the weakness of parts has led to the suggestion of double authorship. The Cambridge editors, Messrs. Clark and Wright, refer I. ii., III. v., and the last forty lines to Middleton. This is an extravagant view, but there is

entangled in a hellish net. His wife screws her courage to a point at which it will not stick, and the cord snaps under the tension.

*King Lear* (Quartos, 1608).

*King Lear* was performed at Whitehall on December 26th, 1606.[1] Two quarto editions, both imperfect and not quite alike, were published in 1608. The play is founded on a very ancient story, versions of which Shakespeare had read in Holinshed (whose account is based on that of Geoffrey of Monmouth), in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (Bk. II. x.), and probably in an anonymous old play of 1593, entitled *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters*. Shakespeare, however, radically altered the whole tale. In all the earlier versions the story ends with the triumph of Lear and Cordelia. The story of Gloucester and his sons is from Sidney's *Arcadia* (Bk. II. 10); but the common love of Goneril and Regan for Edmund is a device of Shakespeare's own.[2]

This play is more terrible than *Macbeth*, more piteous than *Othello*, more profound than *Hamlet*, but less human than any of them. And it is too sublime for terror, too profound for pity, and almost too vast for thought. It is bewildering in its intensity and its breadth: the mind refuses to grasp it as a whole. A scene is enough. It can never be as popular on the stage as the other great tragedies are. Hamlet is a part in which no great actor has failed; but no one can act Lear, for Lear is more than

better reason for supposing that the incongruous Hecate is an interpolation, though this view is ably contested by Mr. Verity in the Pitt Press *Macbeth*.

[1] Reference to 'the late eclipse' (October, 1605) suggests the winter of 1605-6 as the probable time of composition.

[2] Shakespeare took the name Cordelia from Spenser, in preference to Holinshed's Cordeilla. The Fool is entirely of his creation.

a man.[1] Everything is fused in this drama: folly and wisdom, madness and sanity, pity and rage, are one.

A few small points may be noted. Regan and Goneril with their barbaric energy and ruthless passions remind one of the Merovingians and the stories in Thierry, though Shakespeare had probably never heard of Brynhild. Is the scene in which Gloucester's eyes are torn out good art? Would the hanging of Cordelia be less intelligible without it? Some shrink from the blinding and some from the wholesale slaughter at the end. It may at least be pointed out that it would have been utterly unlike Shakespeare to leave Regan and Goneril triumphant. It is significant that, unlike *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the play does not end with any note of triumph or of hope.

*Timon of Athens* probably belongs to the year 1607.

*Timon of Athens* (1623).

The story, a story well known and popular in England at the time, may have been taken by Shakespeare from various sources. It is found first, in different forms, in Plutarch's life of Marcus Antonius, and in a dialogue of Lucian, *Timon, or the Misanthrope*. Apemantus, Alcibiades, the fig-tree story, and the epitaph are all in Plutarch; the conception of Timon as a disillusioned philanthropist and his discovery of treasure

[1] 'The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. . . . On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodised from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind' (Charles Lamb).

are in Lucian. The story is very badly told in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566-9), and Boiardo had turned Lucian's dialogue into a comedy, styled *Il Timone*. An English play on the subject had been written about 1600. It is generally believed that *Timon of Athens*, the text of which is very corrupt, is not entirely Shakespeare's. Most of the third and fifth acts may have been written by a collaborator, though Shakespeare probably wrote almost all the scenes in which Timon is the centre. It is impossible to be certain who was the collaborator. It may or may not have been an obscure person named George Wilkins.[1] The analogy between the situations of Timon and Lear is striking. Timon and Lear alike are ruined by ingratitude; both are driven into madness and misery; both fall suddenly from wealth and power into the condition of outcasts. But there is no comparison between the two dramas as to value. It is hardly just to speak of *Timon* as a whole, since in truth Shakespeare's *Timon* is only a fragment. But the Shakespearean portions of *Timon* are by no means on the level of *Lear*. The diction is curiously involved, abrupt, elliptical, packed with useless metaphor, and is less lucid than in any earlier play. The idea is presented harshly and with violence. There is a good deal of sonorous but rather empty declamation. Nevertheless the play contains magnificent passages.[2]

[1] A George Wilkins published a play called *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* in 1607; and a George Wilkins published a prose story, *The Painful Adventures of Pericles*, in 1608, based on the play *Pericles*. Morley distinguishes these into two people and says that No. 1 died about 1603. Stapfer thinks that the whole of *Timon* is by Shakespeare. There is little or no local colour. Most of the names are Latin.

[2] It is impossible to sympathize with Timon. He is a fool from the beginning, and becomes a furious and inhuman lunatic with unnatural abruptness.

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1623).

*Antony and Cleopatra* was entered on the Stationers' Registers as licensed on 20th May, 1608, though not actually published till 1623. The story is taken from Plutarch, whom Shakespeare follows very closely, especially in the first three acts. He softens considerably the character of Antony, however, and completely ignores the suggestion of political aims in the passion of Cleopatra. The wonderful banquet scene (Act II. vii.) is developed from a mere suggestion in Plutarch. This play is perhaps only not the greatest of all Shakespeare's tragedies, because the theme is smaller and has less reach than the themes of *Hamlet* and *Lear*, and because its construction is faulty and its unity imperfect. Antony is merely a man who throws away sovereignty for love; and that rather ignobly, for he is half-hearted about it, and hankers, almost in the arms of his mistress, after the political position that is slipping from him. He despises Caesar and yet is conscious of inferiority. He is unstable to the point of cowardice, and his marriage with Octavia is an act of disgusting meanness. There is nothing terrible or very piteous in the tragedy of this splendid but weak man. Cleopatra is consummate—one of the most wonderful things in Shakespeare—an enchantress, really in love with Antony's power and splendour, but without any depth of feeling. She dies magnificently, but only because she has failed to take Octavius in 'her strong toil of grace.'

The play suffers from lack of concentration on the two principal figures; it is ill-constructed and contains much that is superfluous. Act III. opens with a scene which has absolutely no relation to the action of the play and no interest of its own. If Shakespeare inserted this scene merely because the triumphant return of Ventidius is mentioned by Plutarch, he must have supposed that he

was writing a chronicle play. In this not improbable case, *Antony and Cleopatra* became a great, though diffusely-constructed tragedy, only because Shakespeare's imagination was too intensely interested by the principal figures to allow him simply to dramatize the historical narrative. There is too much of Pompey and his friends: far more than is necessary to illustrate the confusions arising from Antony's abandonment of duty. But Shakespeare's power of characterization and his poetic force are at their height in this play. Octavius is an extremely fine foil to Antony; and Enobarbus, who is almost a chorus, is one of Shakespeare's best characterizations.[1] There is nothing in Shakespeare finer than the last two acts, and the rise of the drama to a culmination of splendour is unique so far as Shakespeare is concerned.

*Coriolanus* (1623).

In *Coriolanus*, which probably belongs to the year 1609, Shakespeare again takes a story from Plutarch, and this time follows his authority more closely than ever, paraphrasing whole passages.[2] It is a drama of immense power and intellectual value, unsatisfactory in diction. The diction resembles that of *Timon* rather than that of *Antony and Cleopatra*; but its comparative obscurity is no doubt partly due to the fact that the text is more corrupt than that of almost any other of Shakespeare's plays. Even allowing for this, however, the diction is less lucid than in any previous play, and strikingly contrasts in this respect with the majestic lucidity of that of *Julius Cæsar*. The verse continually

[1] Note especially his tremendous answer to Cleopatra's 'What can we do, Enobarbus?'—'Think, and die.' The packing of metaphors is, perhaps, closer in this play than in any other.

[2] This is especially noticeable in the long speech of Coriolanus in the house of Aufidius (IV. v.) and in Volumnia's great speech (V. iii.).

tends to become prose, and the language again and again approaches that of common speech. Metrically the play belongs to the latest period rather than to that of *Hamlet*.

The theme is the tragedy of a man of great courage, great honesty, and great intellect, whose splendid qualities are ruined by an insensate and inhuman pride. Coriolanus is a giant, and his superiority is real; but his passionate contempt of the common crowd amounts to positive hatred, and the violence of his temper is absolutely ferocious. His behaviour in the 'gown of humility' is outrageous and utterly unreasonable: nothing is asked of him but common civility. Politically he is simply a revolutionist: his action tends to a destruction of the constitution of the republic. Moreover, he is without patriotism; he is not even loyal to his own class. He is loyal to his own family only. Pride and the ferocity of his temper make of him a public enemy, and there was nothing to be done with such a man but to banish him or make him despot. The interest of the play is almost as concentrated as that of *Othello*.

## § 5. *Romance.*

With *Coriolanus* the period of Shakespeare's preoccupation with tragic themes comes to an end. With his deepened sense of tragic possibilities, and his acquired and complete mastery of character and passion, he turned again to the love of his youth, Romance. He turned, that is, to a form of drama in which tragic passion, irony, and playfulness, broad comedy, lyrism, the fantastic, the real, and the ethereal could all be united. The last three plays, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, are almost an epitome of all that had gone before. Tragic endings to

such plays as these were out of the question. Had *The Winter's Tale* been ended tragically, Florizel and Perdita must have been treated quite differently, if not omitted altogether. For these last plays Shakespeare required a freer hand than a tragic theme could allow. About probability he had never been over-anxious, but in these plays he refuses its fetters utterly.

We must always remember that Shakespeare was an actor-dramatist. The motley may have been irksome to him at times, yet, like all actors, he was loyal to 'the profession.' The forethought of the actor is seen on every page of his drama.[1] His stage-sense is supreme, and his

[1] Shakespeare was, in fact, a manager to the midriff, and, for those who look at his plays very attentively, there are even signs that he would not have disdained what Mr. Crummles called 'the London plan.' Like Victor Hugo, he had a great love for stage-archaeology and pageant. His passion for stage-illusion incurred some ridicule, and his foible for elaboration eventually led to the fire at the Globe Theatre on 29th June, 1613. Observe the effective note of costume in such parts as Shylock, Parolles, Malvolio, Osric, Autolycus. How fond he was of plume and feather, doublet and hose! His seeming over-fondness for the assumption of boys' parts by his heroines was due, no doubt, to his recognition that boys, after all, are best in boys' parts. Many of the illusions of his plots depend upon costume. Falstaff is brought on at various times as a highwayman, a captain of foot, as Herne the Hunter, as the old witch of Brentford, and as the clothes going to the wash. Above all, note the costume contrast in *Lear* (III. iv.), where we see Lear in his kingly robes, the Fool in motley, Kent in the garb of a retainer, Gloster in cloth and velvet, and Edgar disguised as a madman with rude blanket and fillets of straw. Such apparitions as Moorish grandees, envoys from the 'Isle of Delphos,' and nobles disguised as Russians must have given an exotic diversity to the Shakespearean scene. Observe, too, how Shakespeare contrasts fat and lean men—he must have had a 'human anatomy' or living skeleton in his company for such parts as Pinch, Starveling, and the 'meagre' apothecary of *Romeo and Juliet*. Similarly he uses tall and short, dark and

actor's sensitiveness revealed to him as by intuition the veering puffs of any popular air-current. In 1602 his ready adaptability had possibly co-operated with the profound artistic instinct which prompted Shakespeare to abandon the summer seas of his prose comedy for the unexplored ocean-depths of *Hamlet* and *Lear*. His genius rendered the transition to tragic themes as acceptable to the public as it was to the leading actors. The great rôles of Tamburlaine and Ieronymo had to pale their ineffectual fires in the presence of such parts as Macbeth and Othello. But the vein could not last. Signs of artistic reaction are already perceptible in *Antony* and *Coriolanus*. Moreover, strange lights were visible on the horizon. The success of such plays as Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* can hardly have failed to suggest to the Shakespeare of 1610 a reversion to less strenuous themes. The mellowness was succeeding to the gravity of ripe experience. The pearly tones of his earlier forest romance could be repeated now with the enhanced effect of a rich poetic after-glow.

*Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* belong to the years

fair, clowns and witches, wrestlers and fencers, music and dance (pavane, galliard, cinque pace, coranto), armour, masques and collars of SS. Trained animals were just coming in when he produced Launce and his *dog*. (See a very interesting lecture by Mr. H. Davey, *Brighton Herald*, 5th November, 1887.) A treatise might be written upon the headgear of Shakespeare's characters; another upon the beards. The provision of an actor is seen no less in his marvellous grouping, in the getting of corpses (Hotspur, Polonius, Clarence) off the stage, and in the provision of breathing-spaces for actors in heavy parts. (For valuable hints see Oscar Wilde's discerning essay on 'The Truth of Masques' in *Intentions*.) There is ever more of the inspired improviser than of the hidebound academic artist about Shakespeare. His creative faculty and his resources were indeed of the kind not to be clogged or impeded, but to be pointed and stimulated by the determining force of external limitation or suggestion.

1610-11, and the last-mentioned was performed at the Globe in May of the latter year.[1] Both these plays combine an almost childish romance of plot, an utter disregard of plausibility, with most minute and finished realism in the presentation of individual figures or situations. All through Shakespeare's plays there is a tendency to this combination: in these two this tendency has worked out its final result. *Cymbeline*, the story of which is made out of scraps of Holinshed and a tale of Boccaccio,[2] is almost ruined by its plot. It is not the anachronisms that matter—though this is the most freely and wildly anachronistic of all Shakespeare's plays[3]—but the monstrous conduct of Posthumus makes his final reconciliation with Imogen unpleasant to regard closely, while the conversion of Iachimo is merely childish.

*Cymbeline* (1623).

*The Winter's Tale* is founded on Greene's story *Pandosto* (1588), but Shakespeare has clumsily secured a 'happy' ending by most unplausible means: and, after all, the ending is not even 'happy,' a fact which Shakespeare himself saw. It

*Winter's Tale* (1623).

[1] Malone in his first attempt assigned this play to 1594. Hurdis pronounced it the second in chronological order of the plays, the first being *Antony and Cleopatra*! Dr. Simon Forman saw *The Winter's Tale* at the Globe, 15th May, 1611.

[2] From the *Decameron* (Second Day, Novel 9); but the nucleus of the story has already been traced back a good deal further in the French: it was given in English in a collection of stories called *Westward for Smelts* and possibly published before 1610. The Bohemian portion of the story is mainly original, but there are possible hints for it in Fairfax's *Tasso*, in Bk. VI. and at the beginning of Bk. VII., where Erminia seeks refuge with a shepherd and his three sons (a new point kindly suggested by Mr. W. J. Craig).

[3] In the first century B.C. persons are distinguished as a Frenchman, a Dutchman, and a Spaniard, and the British king's courtiers make free with terms of Protestant theology.

is curiously significant that Hermione says nothing—not a single word—to her penitent husband in the last scene.

Yet these two plays contain some of the most beautiful passages and some of the most perfect characters in all Shakespeare, and the loveliest of all his women. There is nothing stronger than the presentation of Leontes' jealousy,[1] nothing more subtle than Iachimo (putting aside his absurd conversion), no figure quite so beautiful as Imogen. It is open to question whether these plays, with all their defects of construction and confusions of idea, are not the most beautiful of Shakespeare's creations. They are at once childish in plot and extraordinarily intellectual, patchily constructed and unequal,[2] but containing profound wisdom and divine poetry; they include psychological absurdities, such as the conversions of Iachimo and Leontes, along with the exquisite reality of Imogen. With Autolycus, Perdita, and Mopsa, we are back in the Forest of Arden, almost as lighthearted as ever,[3] but with a far riper wisdom:

> 'A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a.'

*The Tempest* (1623).

*The Tempest* was, perhaps, the last complete play written by Shakespeare. It is not known to have been performed before May, 1613.[4] No source has yet been discovered for the plot; a similar tale, however, is told by a Spanish novellettist, Eslava, in his *Noches de Invierno*, Madrid, 1609. Local colouring is derived

[1] The penitent Leontes is by no means so convincing.

[2] Note especially the poorly written monologue and perfunctory exposition in *Cymbeline* (III. iii.).

[3] Perdita, the shepherdess, talks of Proserpine and Dis quite in the old manner, but with added tenderness and a deeper grace. Paulina and Autolycus are both original to Shakespeare—the name Autolycus he had met with in Golding (Ovid, *Metamorph.* xi.).

[4] The controversy started in 1839 as to the date of *The Tempest*

from Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Bermudas, otherwise called the Isle of Divels*, and from successive pamphlets by Joseph Hunter, who conjectured 1596, has been gradually narrowed down to two years, 1611 or 1612. Allusions (in Act II., Sc. i.) to Montaigne's Essays first showed that it was written after 1603, and the reference to Caliban in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre* (Prologue) of 1614 shows that it was written before that date. The style and temper of the play refer it to Shakespeare's last period, 1609-13, and the metrical tests, as far as they go, all point in this direction (*a*, there is only one rhyming couplet; *b*, double endings are more numerous than in any other play, being 35 per cent.; *c*, run-on lines are very frequent, 41 per cent.; *d*, speeches nearly always end in the middle of a verse, as in *Winter's Tale*). Confirmation of these views is derived from the fact that there are several little touches in the description of the island that are obviously derived from two tracts about the newly discovered Bermudas, published at the end of 1610; while, on the other hand, we have evidence that *The Tempest* was played at Court in May, 1613. Malone, a trustworthy writer, had documentary evidence, which he unfortunately lost, to the effect that it was written in 1611. In its present form there is ground for believing, with Dr. Garnett, that the play was first presented at the wedding of the Elector Palatine with James I.'s daughter Elizabeth in February, 1613. The brevity of the piece (shortest save the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Macbeth*, and the *Errors*) and the introduction of the masque in Act III. support the theory that it was given at a Court ceremonial. The play was first printed in the folio of 1623, the text being exceptionally good. In this play Shakespeare pays an unwonted respect to the unities of time and place, the only other plays that approach it in this respect being *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Comedy of Errors*, and the *Merry Wives*. The exquisite songs of Ariel have inspired great music from Shakespeare's own day to this (Beethoven, asked the meaning of his D minor and F minor Sonatas, replied, 'Read *The Tempest*'); while the half-human figure of Caliban, besides a crop of fantastic German theories, has drawn forth Browning's study of *Caliban upon Setebos*, of an untutored being groping after a God, and Renan's brilliant drama, *Caliban, Suite de la Tempête*. Here Prospero discovers that his magic was more needful in his recovered kingdom of Milan than on the island, and retains Ariel in his service accordingly.

upon the same insular object of popular curiosity by William Strachey and others which appeared during the winter of 1610-11 or in 1612. Jacob Ayrer, a Nuremberg playwright, dramatized a faintly similar story in his *Die schöne Sidea*, written before 1605, and it is not impossible that English, Spanish, and German plots are derived from one and the same forgotten Italian novel.[1]

This final romance of *The Tempest* is as fantastic and harmonious as *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and at least as deep as *Hamlet*.[2] Solemnity, irony, broad humour, lyric of unearthly beauty, are combined in a shining serenity. The poet seems, Ariel-like, to sport with language, and to amuse himself with new discovery of its resources. Search has been made for symbolism in this play; but if there be any, it is probably unconscious, and it certainly eludes demonstration. The idea that Shakespeare represented himself in the enchanter Prospero has little but its attractiveness to recommend it. Between Prospero, the over-man, and the beast-man Caliban, lies the whole range not only of Shakespearean, but also of human character.

*Henry VIII.* (1623).

*Henry VIII.* was certainly performed at the Globe in June, 1613, and may have been the last play in the writing of which Shakespeare had any part. It is chiefly based on Hall and Holinshed, but a 'chronicle-history' play on Henry VIII. called *When you see me you know me*, by Samuel Rowley, had been printed in 1605. On the question of its authorship

[1] Other works to which Shakespeare was indebted in a minor degree for names or ideas are Eden's *History of Travayle*, Florio's *Montaigne*, Golding's *Ovid*, and Thomas's *Historye of Italy* (1561). The contention as to whether the enchanted isle should be identified with Malta, Lampedusa, or Corcyra is richly illustrative of the crazy side of Shakespearean critical controversy.

[2] 'Is not *The Tempest* a kind of English *Faust*?' asked Jowett.

considerable controversy has arisen.[1] The play is written in two kinds of verse, so distinct that it is difficult to resist the inference that it had two authors. No two passages of blank verse could well be more unlike metrically than the Katharine trial scene and the famous scene between Wolsey and Cromwell. The former scene is written in the latest Shakespearean verse, and can hardly be by any one but Shakespeare; the latter is written in what is distinctly the verse of Fletcher. The same difference runs all through the play, verse of both kinds occurring even in the same scene. The latest verse of Shakespeare is structurally irregular; it depends on the

[1] Certain singularities in the play were early recognized by critics. A pause and cadence foreign to Shakespeare, and a strangeness in the metre, due to the frequency of redundant syllables, were first pointed out in 1758 (Edwards, *Canons of Criticism*, 6th ed.). Johnson remarked that the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katharine; Coleridge called the piece an historical masque or show play; even the parabolic Ulrici failed to find profound moral purpose in *Henry VIII.* Tennyson remarked that many passages were very much after the manner of Fletcher. But James Spedding, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for August and October, 1850, was the first to express a clear conviction that large portions of the play were utterly un-Shakespearean in character. These portions he conjectured to be mainly by Fletcher (cf. article in *Westminster Review*, xlvii. 59). To Shakespeare were assigned six scenes (I. i. ii., II. iii. iv., III. ii. to King's exit, V. i.), the remaining twelve to Fletcher. Mr. Swinburne pleads eloquently against the Fletcherian authorship of the Katharine death-scene. One theory is that after the Globe fire two-thirds of Shakespeare's play was re-written by Fletcher. Another that Fletcher was inspired by Shakespeare's proximity to write beyond his wont; or that Shakespeare in this piece deliberately imitated the popular Fletcherian manner. Finally, that it was improvised hurriedly by Shakespeare and Fletcher in the spring of 1613 to humour the zeal of the Londoners about the Protestant match of that season. The best recent summary is that by Mr. Nichol Smith in the Warwick *Henry VIII.*

rhythm of sentences rather than on lines, and constantly tends to become prose. The verse of Fletcher is very regular in structure; it depends on the rhythm of its lines, and is therefore always most definitely verse. It is almost impossible to believe that a writer would use such different kinds of verse in the same scene, even if he could do so. The publication of the play in the folio of 1623 makes it almost certain that Shakespeare had a considerable share in the writing of it; it is probable therefore that in writing it he collaborated to some extent with Fletcher. Yet the unconvincing nature of 'metrical tests' alone is well illustrated by the fact that some critics assign the Wolsey farewell speeches to Shakespeare simply on the ground that they are too fine to have been written by Fletcher. As a whole, for all its splendours, the play has no kind of unity, and is rather a pageant than a drama. The texture is often thin, rhetorical, and vague to an extent almost incredible in the creator of *The Tempest*. Neither the tragedy of Wolsey nor that of the Queen is fully worked out, while the ending is feeble and inconsequent. The last act has, in fact, no relation to those preceding it, and very little interest of any kind.

Doubtful Plays.

Several plays which were excluded from the first folio were published within fifty years of Shakespeare's death, as wholly or in part by him. Not one of them has a shadow of a claim to be considered as wholly and undoubtedly by Shakespeare. Of those which are claimed to be in part by Shakespeare, there are three in which to a very varying extent the best critics are fairly unanimous in recognizing Shakespeare's manner: the only one in which they are prepared to testify upon oath to the work of the master's hand is *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, in which the passages relating to Marina and the shipwreck have the appearance of a first draft upon material afterwards used in *The Tempest*. This was printed in quarto as Shakespeare's in 1609, was excluded from

the folios of 1623 and 1632, but appeared in the folio of 1664. The story had previously been related by John Gower in the *Confessio Amantis* as that of *Apollonius of Tyre*. The bulk of the play is believed to have been written by some comparatively undeveloped dramatic writer, perhaps George Wilkins (the conjectured partner in *Timon*), while the resources of the master-hand at the period of its maturity are distinctly traceable in Acts III., IV. and V.

With regard to the next quasi-Shakespearean play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (which was printed in 1634 as by John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, though it was included in the first folio edition of neither dramatist), there is much stronger reason for doubt. 'A very uncertain sound is virtually all that oracles usually responsive (Dowden, Furnivall, Ten Brink) can be prevailed upon to emit.'[1] Some passages in Act I. are written in Shakespeare's manner, as Hazlitt justly pointed out, and certain other fragments in Act II. and Act V., are sufficiently like Shakespeare in metrical quality and manner, heavily weighted as they are with the 'massive brocade of Elizabethan thought,' for us readily to believe (though without absolute conviction) that Shakespeare put his hand to them. Take, for instance, the finely compacted argument for war in Arcite's appeal to Mars in Act V. (i. 49):

> 'Thou mighty one, that with thy power hast turn'd
> Green Neptune into purple; whose approach
> Comets prewarn; whose havock in vast field
> Unearthèd skulls proclaim; whose breath blows down
> The teeming Ceres' foyzon; who dost pluck
> With hand armipotent from forth blue clouds
> The mason'd turrets; that both mak'st and break'st
> The stony girths of cities; me thy pupil,
> Young'st follower of thy drum, instruct this day
> With military skill. . . .
> O, great corrector of enormous times,

[1] The *locus classicus* for this discussion is *A Letter on Shakespeare's Authorship of the Two Noble Kinsmen*, by Wm. Spalding, New Shaks. Soc., 1876.

> Shaker of o'er-rank States, thou grand decider
> Of dusty and old titles, that heal'st with blood
> The earth when it is sick, and cur'st the world
> O' th' plurisy of people.'

Both *Henry VIII.* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are usually assigned to 1613. At this time Shakespeare's stage career was on the eve of termination. He had realized the most normal ambition of the strong man—returning to the home of his youth with the fortune that he had made in the centre of competition. His balance was drawn. He had written 'settled' at the bottom of the account. We know what his old comrades thought of him: 'Our Shakespeare,' 'So worthy a friend and fellow.' They would hardly let him go without a token of goodwill:

> 'Sweet swan of Avon! what a sight it were
> To see thee in our waters yet appeare!'

Shakespeare had already recognized in Fletcher (now thirty-four to his forty-nine) the rising hope and crown-prince, as it were, both of 'the company' and the playgoing circle of which he had so long been the undisputed *roi-soleil*. And so it came about, we can readily believe, by way of emphasizing the transfer of the chief authorship and its 'good will' to John Fletcher, and giving a good send-off to the new *régime*, that Shakespeare, good-humoured as ever, handed over to Fletcher fragments of an unfinished *Henry VIII.* and passages which the younger dramatist endeavoured to weave into the texture of his *Two Noble Kinsmen*. The actors, ten years on, recognized their old chief in *Henry VIII.* and straight it went into the Folio. As regards the more highly Fletcherized *Two Noble Kinsmen* the tradition was much more exiguous. It was enough, however, to cause the play to be printed as by Shakespeare and Fletcher in the Quarto of 1634, nine years after Fletcher's death.

With regard to *Edward III.*, an historical play in the grand manner first published anonymously in 1596, the Shakespearean authorship seems to have been first suggested by Edward Capell in his *Prolusions* of 1760. The splendour of one or two speeches, especially those in which the Countess of Salisbury reprises Edward III., has won it the support of critics such as Delius,

Fleay, and Dr. Ward. Act I. ii., and Act III. i. and ii., are attributed to the Shakespeare of the *King John* period. The view may be plausible; it can be no more.

## § 6. *Metrical Development.*

A striking fact concerning Shakespeare's work as a whole, and one which differentiates it from that of almost all other artists in literature, is its progressive character. Some great writers leave their great work behind them while they are yet young; others lose power in middle age, even if their thought widens. Even Goethe's mind loses power as it passes from the First Part of *Faust* to the wider thought of the Second Part. But Shakespeare is still growing in largeness of outlook if not in power, and to the end he loses nothing. Beginning with brilliant experiments and imitative essays in drama, he reaches the limits of pure fancy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, scales the heights of observation of common life, and sounds the depth of its humour in *Henry IV.*, *Much Ado*, and *Twelfth Night*; produces perfect comedy in which reality, romance, and humour blend exquisitely; passes on to unapproached altitudes in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Lear*; and when it is apparently impossible that absolute power should increase, he still widens his thought to include the old romance, the old joyfulness and lyrism; and ends in the sovereign serenity of *The Tempest*, passionless but not less powerful than the greatest of his tragedies. What could have come next? We should be inclined to say that Shakespeare himself could have gone no further; but we remember that we should probably have said the same thing had he ended with *Antony and Cleopatra*.

This development of Shakespeare's art might be traced in detail along the line of his characterization, but it can

be as well and more simply traced through the development of his metrical power; for his verse, always supple and adequate, from first to last fits his thought like a skin. The plays have been subjected throughout to the most minute metrical analysis. It has been clearly shown that the metrical structure of all plays known to be early in date differs profoundly from that of all plays known to be late; while every intermediate stage between this early and this late verse is also found. The change from the earliest to the latest verse being traceable through a regular series of gradations, the character of the verse alone enables us approximately to date a particular play. Approximately only: since it would be absurd to contend that by the use of the metrical tests, as they are called, we are able to establish any exact chronological order among the plays. A slight increase in the percentage of unstopped lines or weak endings does not suffice to show that one play is later than another: it is only when the difference of metrical structure is very strongly marked between two plays that certainty is reached. Taken in connexion with what is certainly known as to the order of the plays, the metrical tests would prove positively that *Henry V.* is later than *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Hamlet* than *Henry V.*: they would not suffice to prove that *Henry V.* is earlier or later than *Much Ado* or *The Merchant of Venice*. The results of the application of metrical tests, however, coincide remarkably closely with the order worked out by critics on grounds of external evidence, and of critical conjecture based upon other than metrical grounds. The verse of Shakespeare's early dramas is fluent and facile, full of antithesis, abounding in rhyme, quick and trim in movement, but lacking in melody and in variety of cadence. Formally, it is highly conventional and careful to assert itself unmistakably as verse. The

line is so absolutely the unit of it that it is rarely unstopped: that is, a distinct pause usually occurs at the end of a line, and comparatively very rarely before the end of one. The verse has a strong tendency to resolve itself into a series of couplets, whether 'blank' or rhymed.[1]

It was probably either in *Romeo and Juliet* or in *Richard II.* that Shakespeare first wrote quite beautiful verse. There are occasional snatches of verse of musical quality in *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV. iii. 341):

> 'For valour, is not Love a Hercules
> Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
> Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical
> As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair;
> And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
> Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.'

But even this passage is evidently a succession of three pretty couplets in blank verse rather than a harmony as a whole. From this to the duet between *Romeo and Juliet* (Act III. v.) the advance is already very great. Here we have thirty-six subtly harmonized lines of very sweetly modulated verse, various in cadence and certainly beautiful, if not very strong.[2]

[1] An unstopped or run-on line is one which has no pause at the end of it, *i.e.*, one in which the sense, or, more strictly, the sound, runs on unbroken into the next line. A pause arising naturally at the end of a clause is marked by a stop in the printing; but it must be observed that a mere comma is ambiguous, for a comma sometimes marks what may be considered grammatically as the end of a clause, but does not involve any actual pause of the voice. In considering verse as such it is sound alone that counts, and a line at the end of which the voice should not pause perceptibly is an unstopped line, whether or no the determination of the line is punctuated.

[2] Note how in this and other such passages the rhymes are quite

As Shakespeare's power developed his verse became continually more flexible and free, more various in cadence, and more regardless of regularity. Unstopped lines and light endings continually increase in frequency.[1] Rhyme becomes more and more rare, and extra syllables are more and more often placed at the end of the line. The line itself becomes less and less insistent. The verse pauses anywhere, at quite irregular intervals, and the tendency to pause at the end of a line as such disappears almost completely if not altogether. It depends less and less on line structure, or any orderly and regular sequence of sound within the line, and more and more on the balance of sentences and on emphasis. Gradually it approaches prose:

'I shall lack voice: the deeds of Coriolanus should not be uttered feebly. It is held that valour is the chiefest virtue and most dignifies the haver: if it be, the man I speak of cannot in the world be singly counterpoised. At sixteen years, when Tarquin made a head for Rome, he fought beyond the mark of others. Our then dictator, whom with all praise I point at, saw him fight, when with his Amazonian chin he drove the bristled lips before him' (*Coriolanus*, Act. II. ii.).

Written thus this passage is not quite obviously verse,

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in place and serve to heighten the effect, the verse not yet being strong enough to do without them.

[1] The increased use of the light ending, that is, the employment of (weak) unstressed monosyllables, such as *if* or *and*, at the end of a line goes naturally along with the increase in the number of unstopped lines. A line ending with such a word as *for* may be called the extreme case of an unstopped line. Light endings are quite uncommon in plays written before 1606 or thereabouts; but after *Macbeth* they rapidly increase in number, and in the romantic plays of the last period they are very numerous, especially in *Cymbeline* —46 per cent. in this play to 8 per cent. in *Taming of the Shrew*.

and it would be possible for a dull ear to miss its cadences in reading.

But though Shakespeare's latest blank verse not infrequently verges on a cadenced and magnificent prose, it never actually becomes prose even in *Henry VIII.* The fact that to the end the poet clung to blank verse as the right and legitimate form of the romantic or tragic drama is full of significance.[1]

An increasing use of double or feminine endings, that is, of a redundant syllable at the end of a line, is another important feature of Shakespeare's metrical development. As an extremely fine example of the use of such endings may be cited a passage from *The Tempest* (III. ii. 144), in which it should be observed how essentially the redundant syllables modify the character of the verse, and how rich and soft they make it:

> 'Be not afeard: the isle is full of noi|ses
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt | not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments

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[1] So loyal was Shakespeare to Marlowe's mighty line, or at least his legacy of dramatic blank verse, that it is quite difficult to find such forms as the true Alexandrine or the four accented line amid the harmonious ocean of the blank verse. The exceptions are when some special effect is aimed at, as in 'Double, double toil and trouble,' or when the verse is interrupted, as by an entrance, alarum, or shout. *Love's Labour's Lost* has but nine feminine endings, while in *Cymbeline* there are over seven hundred. Two extra syllables are sometimes introduced as

'I dare | avouch | it, sir. | What fif | ty fol | lŏwĕrs.' (*Lear.*)

The growing frequency with which now monosyllabic and now trisyllabic feet are introduced into the blank verse is simply another and kindred symptom of the general change and increasing flexibility.

> Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voi|ces
> That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again: and then, in dream|ing,
> The clouds methought would open and show rich|es
> Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked
> I cried to dream again.'

In Shakespeare's hands blank verse gradually became a measure capable of almost unlimited variety of music and expression. If there is comparatively little verse in his plays which strikes us as of quite extraordinary, pure musical quality, that is because the utterance of passion or thought not merely ideal but positive, the result of an actual and defined situation, can rarely be made perfectly musical without psychological untruth. The language of passion is not that of epic or of lyric. Nor indeed is it that of Shakespeare's drama: but though Shakespeare's diction is ideal, it is not employed in the presentment of ideal, but of real passions, positive and complex. He rarely finds occasion for verse of purely magnificent sound; and whether his melody suffer or not, Shakespeare in his maturity is always equal to the occasion. He is never preoccupied with verbal music, but it comes from him when it should come and as far as it should come. On great occasions, as in Cleopatra's death-scene, it is as great as possible. Or in this from *Hamlet* (I. iv. 46):

> 'Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell
> Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
> Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,
> Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned,
> Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
> To cast thee up again. What may this mean
> That thou, dread corse, again in complete steel
> Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
> Making night hideous; and we fools of nature

So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?'[1]

## § 7. *Shakespeare's Use of Prose.*

A concentration and intensification of the speech of common life is necessary in drama as, to a lesser degree, in the novel. Even in the novel the artist's method of treating dialogue cannot be photographic. People must be made to express themselves more concisely and incisively, with less irrelevance and indefiniteness, above all more significantly than they ordinarily do in real life. This is necessary partly that their speech, which cannot be immediately illustrated by tone or gesture, may be clearly significant and partly that it may not be tedious. In drama this intensification of ordinary speech must needs be carried still further, because of the smaller canvas used and the absence of any explanatory notes. It is this idealization of dramatic dialogue that justifies or requires the use of an idealized form of speech, that is, of the musical speech, which is verse.

There are, however, many kinds of dialogue for the expression of which verse is radically unfit. Touch and go dialogue, full of quick turns, intimate, witty, playful, can be intensified in prose and would lose something and gain nothing in verse. Broadly comic dialogue is impossible in verse unless at least it be rhymed verse. Even

[1] Observe that in this marvellous piece of verse there is only one very decided pause from 'What may this mean' to the end, and that this is in the middle of a line. There is a slight pause after 'corse' and another after 'moon.' Out of the eleven lines six are absolutely unstopped. As introductory to the study of Shakespearean prosody, see Warwick Shakespeare, *Richard II.*, p. 185, and Introduction to *Othello* in the Bankside Shakespeare.

tense dialogue, full of emotion, but in which the feeling is involved and tormented and the thought moves abruptly and in tangents, cannot gain, and probably loses, if expressed in verse.[1] Only an elliptical, jerky, tortured verse, such as we sometimes find in Browning, could express it. But where feeling is exalted, or is at once passionate and simple, where thought and feeling flow freely and with dignity, the concentrated and heightened expression of it takes naturally the form of musical speech, or verse.

Whatever may be thought of the theory of the double use of verse and prose in drama thus briefly sketched, it appears to be the theory of Shakespeare. Whether or not he was conscious of such views we cannot say. But that he practically held such a view can be deduced from his practice in the plays of his maturity.

There is a preliminary consideration which must be clearly understood. It is obvious that there are many kinds of dialogue which might be rendered without practical loss either in verse or in prose. All conventional speech, all merely explanatory or descriptive speech, all speech that is mildly expostulatory or argumentative or admonitory, may be written equally well in prose or verse. If written in verse it gains in dignity what it loses in rapidity of movement, it gains in beauty what it loses in pure realism. It must always be remembered that verse is *slower* than prose.[2] The concentration of prose is greater; verse is more wordy, and moreover must be read more slowly to bring out its music. The treatment of all

[1] See the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia (III. i.).

[2] Compare Act II. iii. of *As You Like It* with Act II. vi. The latter is written in prose to secure a more rapid movement. Study the gradual change of style in the oration of Brutus in *Julius Cæsar*.

neutral kinds of speech will depend on the convention accepted by the artist. If verse be regarded as the normal mode of dramatic utterance, verse will be used; otherwise he will use prose.

Shakespeare's practice was not, of course, the same all through his artistic life. At starting he accepted the convention that verse is the normal medium of dramatic speech, and that prose is only to be used for special reasons. To this convention he adhered to some extent; but as his powers matured he found more and more reasons for using prose. His use of prose and of verse becomes less and less merely conventional up to the time of *Othello* and *Lear*. In his early, experimental plays he uses prose only for broadly comic or burlesque effects.[1] But in the plays of the second period the conventional use of verse is to a great extent abandoned. Approximately, in these plays, prose is the language of comedy, and verse of dialogue which is sentimental, passionate, or deliberately dignified. In *Romeo and Juliet*, already, there is less convention. The alternations of verse and prose are more rapid than in earlier plays, and more subtly motived. Look at the conversation between the Nurse and Romeo in Act II. iv. They begin in prose, but as soon as Juliet is directly spoken of Romeo rises into verse and the Nurse follows him. Then as soon as the serious matter is settled both decline into prose.[2] In *Henry IV.* the use of verse is rather more con-

[1] In the *Two Gentlemen* and *The Comedy of Errors* there is practically no prose apart from Speed, Launce and the Dromios, and these personages frequently use doggerel verse. In *Love's Labour's Lost* there is hardly any prose apart from Armado, Dull, Holofernes, etc. In *Richard III.* no one speaks prose but the Murderers (I. iv.). In *Richard II.* there is no prose at all. Even the Gardener speaks verse.

[2] Look, too, at the way prose comes in and goes out with Mercutio in Act III. i.

ventional, but Hotspur's tendency to drop into prose is noticeable and significant.[1] In *The Merchant of Venice* there is an admirable and striking instance of departure from convention in the use of prose by Shylock in the Tubal scene (III. i.). Shylock's grotesque passion over his daughter and ducats was not to be dignified by verse! But it is in the mature comedies of this period that Shakespeare's abandonment of conventional verse is most complete. The fact has not been sufficiently emphasized that *Much Ado About Nothing* is a prose comedy. In that play prose is used as the normal form of expression: verse is used only for special reasons. There is, in fact, little verse in the play. It is used in the church scene (IV. i.) for the sake of dignity and passion; it is used to express the grief and anger of Leonato and Antonio; it is used, rather conventionally perhaps, in the last scene, and in the Hero and Ursula scene (III. i.), and in the ceremonial scene at Hero's monument (V. iii.). Otherwise it is used hardly at all, and where it occurs its use is significant. Look at the masked-ball scene (II. i.). It is all in prose except that Claudio, for a moment, grows sentimentally serious in verse. The fact that the Don John scenes are in prose strongly stamps the play as an essentially prose comedy.[2]

Of the other comedies of this period *As You Like It*, pastoral poem as it is, appears to be based on prose rather than on verse. In this play, as in *Much Ado*, it is the use

[1] See Part I., II. iii. and III. i. But notice that after the Falstaff scene (I. ii.) Prince Henry soliloquizes in verse, that the dialogue between him and the Sheriff (II. iv.) is verse, and that he addresses Bardolph—*en prince*—in verse in III. iii.

[2] The verse scenes are III. i., IV. i. (not by any means all of it), V. iii. and iv. V. i. is a mixed scene. The scenes entirely or almost entirely prose are I. i. ii. iii., II. i. ii. iii., III. ii. iii. iv. v., IV. ii., V. ii.

of verse, not the use of prose, that is to be accounted for.[1] In *Twelfth Night* the balance is perfect as between verse and prose, and the changes are almost always clearly motived.[2]

In his mature comedy Shakespeare showed a distinct preference for prose as the natural mode of expression in comedy. In these plays prose is the normal medium, and we shall come to wrong conclusions or to no conclusions if we attempt to explain his use of prose rather than his use of verse. But in the great tragedies that followed, the normal form of expression is verse. Prose is here used only for special reasons, and it is used with extraordinary artistic subtlety. To bring out all the subtleties involved in the use of prose in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Lear* would take up far more space than we can afford. A close examination will show that in these plays Shakespeare worked very consistently, though not perhaps with absolute consistency, on the theory stated at the commencement of this section. Inconsistencies may perhaps be found in relation to passages of a neutral character, and there is apparent a tendency to give soliloquy a sometimes unnecessary dignity by the use of verse.[3] But it will be found that in these plays the use of prose has almost

[1] Look at I. ii. The prose turns to verse when sentiment begins to dominate and Rosalind gives Orlando the chain. Corin, Silvius, and Phebe talk verse as in the conventional pastoral. See how Rosalind breaks in upon their verse in V. i.

[2] In Act I. v. the light, ironic dialogue between Olivia and Viola changes to verse when Viola grows enthusiastic over Olivia's beauty. Olivia answers ironically in prose, but, later, is moved to be serious in verse. The second interview between them is all verse. Note that in the last scene the just indignation of Malvolio is expressed in verse, though he speaks prose everywhere else.

[3] See the soliloquies of Iago, I. iii. and II. i. iii., and of Edmund in *Lear*, I. ii. and III. iii.

invariably an artistic motive, and is rarely governed by mere convention and never by caprice.[1]

In the romantic plays of the latest period we find, as we should expect, a great preponderance of verse and a somewhat careless and conventional alternation between it and prose.

## § 8. *General Characteristics.*

Of the general characteristics of Shakespeare's work, apart from its sheer power, none have attracted more attention than its apparent impersonality and the impressive impartiality with which it presents utterly unlike types of character and the most diverse modes of thought and of feeling. With not one of his crowd of characters does Shakespeare ever seem to identify him-

[1] A few points may be noted. *Hamlet.* The Hamlet-Ophelia scene (III. i.) has been referred to. Note that in this scene Ophelia, whose feeling is simple, tends to speak verse. Almost all the prose in the whole play is spoken by or to Hamlet. He invariably talks prose to Ophelia and to Polonius, as well as to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Ophelia's madness gains enormously through prose. Notice the broken, tormented verse of Hamlet's soliloquy (II. ii.).

*Othello.* Iago shows a strong tendency to prose even in speaking verse (I. i. and IV. ii.). His normal expression is prose. His hypocritical speech when most serious is verse. (See not only III. iii., etc., but the remarks to Montano in II. iii.) Look at Othello's prose in the terrible IV. i.

*Lear.* Every change in the marvellous scenes III. iv. and vi. is artistically motived. Edmund, like Iago, speaks naturally in prose. Look at Kent's alternations in II. ii.; at Lear's cry in verse ('O let me not be mad') in the prose scene I. v. In III. vii. a *servant* interrupts prose dialogue with verse—for good reason. In IV. vi. Gloster says to Edgar: 'Thou speakst in better phrase and matter than thou didst.' In fact, Edgar has changed to verse.

self.[1] He has intellectual sympathy alike with Hamlet and Malvolio, Iago and Imogen. So complete is the detachment of his characters from his own personality that we can never be quite certain how he felt towards any of them. No great writer reveals so little of himself in his writings. Our knowledge of the mere externals of his life is considerable: but for his mental life, his opinions, his temperament and moral outlook, we must go to the plays and poems, and, if we persist in demanding details of them, we shall either be baffled or led by our eagerness into the paths of mere conjecture. There is not a character in the plays which we can reasonably regard as representing Shakespeare; there is not a mood or a passion or a situation which we can know that he himself lived through; there is hardly an opinion which we can know was his. 'Others abide our question,' wrote Arnold of him, 'Thou art free.' But the phrase, like much else written on this subject, is poetically exaggerated. It is true that we cannot make out from the plays what Shakespeare's religion was exactly, or whether or no he held definite political opinions.[2] Much is certainly hidden from us; but if we study the plays attentively we ought not to

[1] Efforts have been made to identify him, partially at least, now with Hamlet, now with Prospero, but no evidence can be found in the plays for such fancies.

[2] Some of us would fain show that his opinions on these matters were the same as their own, and books have been written to prove that Shakespeare was (*a*) a Roman Catholic, (*b*) a Puritan. Many theorists have discerned their own views in the very plays upon which their opponents have mainly relied for a refutation of them. To all the unduly curious the attitude of the dramatist's mind would not be ill-represented, perhaps, by the saying attributed to the Earl of Shaftesbury in Charles II.'s time. To a lady who inquired as to his religion he answered: 'Madam, wise men are but of one religion'; and when she further pressed him to tell what that was, 'Madam, wise men never tell.'

fail to discover in them the main facts concerning Shakespeare's *outlook on life* and something at least of the principles of Shakespearean art. Of necessity the plays involve a certain outlook and arise from certain modes of thought and certain preferences, moral or aesthetic. Landor's 'mighty and beauteous angel' with the hidden face is an exaggerated symbol. The details of the face are indeed hidden; but its type and outlines are not obscured. We have to guard against two things chiefly: a desire to know the unessential leading to fanciful interpretations and baseless theories, and a tendency, strong in the English mind, to confuse aesthetic and moral values. Shakespeare's plays are about as moral as life, but not nearly so moral as many of his commentators. It seems certain that he would not have written dramas as illustrations of truisms or of the sort of wisdom to be found in children's copybooks. To take the plot of one of his tragedies and generalize it into some sort of ethical proposition is a process which proves nothing but a determination towards ethical views on the part of the commentator. No actual story with its complex causation and its element of chance can ever even illustrate an ethical generalization expressive of a mere tendency. 'Murder will out' is simply an untrue saying, unless we understand it as 'Murder tends to come out,' when it at once assumes the aspect of a truism. Whatever the writer supposed, *Arden of Feversham* illustrates this tendency in a merely incidental manner, and could not do more.[1]

But it must certainly be said that Shakespeare, though in no distinctive sense a moral teacher, is on the side of the angels. He has a preference for virtue, as nature has.

[1] The tragedy of *Arden of Feversham* ends on the remark:

'For simple truth is gratious enough
And needs no other points of glosing stuffe.'

His standpoint, like that of almost all northern Europeans, is ethical, and he never forgets that the moral element in life is primary. He will not let wickedness triumph completely. Iago succeeds in his aim, but pays heavily for it; Macbeth's success is ruinous to him; Goneril and Regan are destroyed by their wickedness in the hour of their victory. Probably to Shakespeare the absolute triumph of wickedness seemed abnormal, of the nature of accident, and not of the nature of the permanent. Nor does he ever make a thoroughly bad man the centre of his drama, save in *Richard III.*, where he is following the lead of Marlowe. In his plays good and evil stand in sharply defined contrast and generally in opposition. Complex as many of his characters are, there is never any doubt as to which is which. If there is one thing clear about Shakespeare's attitude towards life it is that it was that of a perfectly sane man, normal in all important respects except in that of intellectual power. His simple and healthy moral feeling has gone far to secure a popularity which his profound intellectuality would never of itself alone have secured. While he is 'not too bright and good for human nature's daily food,' there is no taint in him of moral confusion or of baseness. It is only the morbid, the ill-balanced, the decadent or the puritan who boggles over Shakespeare's morality. The morbid Shakespeare scarcely knows, save as a form of insanity as in Leontes; therefore morbid people may be discontented with him. Of the modern anaemic despair of life, too, Shakespeare knows nothing: the joy of life dominates him always from Falstaff to Miranda. There is no trace of fatalism in him: his tragedy is a tragedy of moral weakness and intellectual blunders, but never of mere brute circumstance.[1] He has

[1] The early and immature (though very beautiful) tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is the only exception.

the optimism of the highest vitality: therefore the pessimist may be discontented. Indeed he can be all things to all men save the unhealthy and the lop-sided.[1] He enters into the utmost exquisiteness of feeling, but he is capable of grossness and does not shrink from it. He loves a rough jest and even a practical joke. He has a foolish but most human love for a pun, good or bad. He can laugh uproariously at Bardolph's red nose without a thought of offence. There is no asceticism about him, and he is under no sense of sin; but he knows that a man pays for his vice with pain or misery or failure. He has, perhaps, little sympathy with merely ideal aspirations; but he loves flowers and girlhood and all sincere and beautiful things. He is tolerant with the genial tolerance of strength and wisdom and charity.[2] Finally and above all—for this is the only absolute test of moral value in a writer—Shakespeare's writings brace us for effort, enlarge our thoughts towards charity, and ennoble our feeling for each other. No one is debased or depressed by Shakespeare, for there is nothing base or cowardly in him. His are the darkness and terror of crag and precipice, and his, too, the exhilaration of the summits.

That Shakespeare is an artist hardly needs asserting at the present day. It is true that his art was probably far less self-conscious than that of Milton or of Tennyson, that it was probably more intuitive than aforethought. The distinction, however, is probably not so important as

[1] Even the decadent appear to find a good deal to their taste. To them, of course, the two greatest plays are *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well*, and then come *Troilus and Cressida*, *Pericles*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

[2] Sometimes he is careless of appearances. He makes Isabella (*Measure for Measure*) take part in a questionable and offensive trick, being confident that no one but a fool will misunderstand; it is only to avoid a far uglier ending.

it seems. A great artist does not need rule or conscious analysis to tell him what is good and what is evil. Any analysis that may be necessary may be done sub-consciously.

As an artist Shakespeare is concerned almost wholly with the artistic worth of humanity. He is never preoccupied with that beauty of 'nature' which haunts so insistently the minds of modern poets. He uses it sometimes with the hand of a master; but his thought is centred on humanity and he passes on. He rarely takes pains to emphasize the picturesque aspect of things, even of the situations he himself creates. He creates the picturesque and leaves it without comment. The mysterious beauty of that watch on the dark battlements of the castle of Elsinore, the cold, the silence, the hushed voices, 'not a mouse stirring' save for that 'portentous figure,' the 'prologue to the omen coming on'—all this is left to speak for itself.

What Shakespeare loves as an artist is power—intensity—in human character. It may be power of intellect or moral power, or power of passion or of grace, or the intensity of the exquisite as in Ariel, or power of love as in Imogen, or power of wit as in Benedick, or intensity of stupidity as in Sir Andrew Aguecheek,[1] whose silliness approaches the sublime; but it is always the intense, the perfect in some kind, that he dwells upon and makes central. Splendid and puissant personalities are the primary material of his tragedies, giants of wit or silliness of his comedy. If we put aside the morbid, there is only one form of the extreme in human character which he never makes use of, and that is the extremely brutal. The merely bestial he disregards entirely. Yet his characters, splendid or extreme as they are, are never extravagant or abnormal in their nature; they are rather perfected types of the

[1] Cf. Roderigo, in *Othello*, and that 'very potent piece of imbecility,' Slender in *Merry Wives*.

normal. We may fairly say that Shakespeare sought for the highest expressions of the normal in humanity. But mere mediocrities Shakespeare makes little use of. He relegates them to the background, and uses them as foils and explanatory notes. Mediocrity may be complex; but Shakespeare has not the modern love of the complex as such, though he masters it when he pleases. But he prefers a complexity that is not commonplace, like that of *Hamlet*. Mediocrity may be tragic or pathetic; but Shakespeare prefers the pathos of Imogen and the tragedy of Lear. The man who is dull but not dull enough to be altogether laughable, the man whose summed virtues make up respectability, whose actions are reducible to fear, who can neither dare nor enjoy freely, is not a subject of Shakespeare's art. He is included and passed over.

The defects and blemishes in Shakespeare's work are many and obvious. They are more obvious than important, and yet, perhaps, they are not generally sufficiently insisted upon at the present day. There is a strong tendency in us to ignore or pass lightly over the faults of a body of work which we have learned to love and reverence and take pride in. The not unnatural attitude is that of the Earl of St. Vincent towards the 'irregular genius' of our greatest seaman. 'But you must not criticize him . . . there can only be one Nelson.' Yet we may remember the profound saying of Vauvenargues: 'Les plus grands ouvrages de l'esprit humain sont très-assurément les moins parfaits.'

It can hardly be denied that Shakespeare's plays abound in word-jugglery and jesting that is often trivial and sometimes sadly out of place; in rhetorical flights which impede or weaken the action and are psychologically false; in inartistically long-winded narrative or description; and in far-fetched and sometimes confusing imagery. In the

earlier plays, especially, he riots in trivial quips and quibbles, sometimes at the most inopportune moments: and from this habit of playing with words and inopportune jesting he never entirely freed himself.[1] In the later plays he heaps up a confusion of unilluminating metaphor to the point of obscurity, and is sometimes guilty of that inexcusable abuse of language which consists in trying to make words do more than can be done with them. In the historical plays he is consistently over-rhetorical. His love of descriptive narrative, of dignified rhetoric, and his desire to work out his thought fully, partially blind him to the essential.[2] The speeches tend to be too long, too diffuse, and too formally complete. The same fault is markedly apparent in the latest plays.[3]

[1] Look at Act III., Sc. ii., of *Romeo and Juliet*; at the far-fetched and confused metaphor about 'minutes, times and hours,' in the King's soliloquy in Act V., Sc. v., of *Richard II.*; at the feeble remark of the Fool inserted at the end of Act I., Sc. v., of *King Lear*. Many of the best critics have directed their shafts against this peculiarity in Shakespeare—what Johnson calls 'the malignant power of a quibble over his mind.' Leigh Hunt speaks in a like vein of his over-informing intellect—*super*abundance of wit and intelligence, thought and allusion; Lowell of his liability to be turned out of his direct course by the first metaphysical quibble that pops up. Dryden was aiming somewhere near the same mark when he spoke of Shakespeare's language as sadly 'pestered' by figurative expressions. It is noteworthy, too, that long after his verse has become too strong to admit of rhyme without derogation, Shakespeare still occasionally inserts a rhymed couplet. This, however, is generally used to round off a scene in an epigrammatic or quasi-proverbial manner—sometimes highly effective. See especially in *Macbeth*.

[2] Morton's narrative speech in *Henry IV.*, Pt. II., Act I., Sc. i., beginning, 'I am sorry I should force you to believe,' full as it is of irrelevant detail, is an example.

[3] Cf. the long-winded narration by Posthumus in *Cymbeline* (V. iii.). See article by Thomas Seccombe, *Bookman*, Oct., 1903.

Nor can it be denied that Shakespeare's plots are very seriously faulty. They are carelessly handled and full of incongruities. Shakespeare shows a disregard for plausibility which, at times, is so great as to suggest a lack of the sense of it. He displays a readiness to make use of preposterous devices in order to hinge a plot or to bring about a catastrophe. The disguise of the Duke and the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, on which the plot of *Measure for Measure* turns, are childish devices worthy of *The Arabian Nights*, and utterly incongruous with the tone of the play. *The Merchant of Venice* is built upon suppositions such as Gilbert and Sullivan might have adorned. *The Winter's Tale* begins like a tragedy, and ends like a fairy tale. In this case it is not merely a matter of crude construction but of confusion of idea. Even in the greatest tragedies the construction is far from perfect. The catastrophe of *King Lear* is forced and hurried:[1] there is no sufficient reason for the suicide of Goneril. The ending of *Hamlet* is brought about by the clumsy device of an excessively unlikely exchange of weapons.[2] Few, in fact, of Shakespeare's plays are entirely plausible, and some of them are afflicted with gross absurdities. Nor can it be pleaded that Shakespeare borrowed his plots, and was therefore not responsible for their imperfections. Such a plea would be absolutely inadmissible even if it were not true that he frequently and freely altered the stories he selected. As a matter of fact, the way in which Shakespeare dealt with his stories illustrates, in several cases, his care-

[1] The nature of the partition, too (Act I., Sc. i.), is carelessly and confusedly represented.

[2] It must be noted, however, that, clumsily brought about as it is (though even this point has been contested, like everything else about Shakespeare), the abrupt and unpremeditated violence of this ending is profoundly true.

lessness of plausibility and even of moral considerations. In the original story of *Othello*, Iago escapes and meets his death later owing to another set of circumstances, while Othello is forced by torture to confess the murder, and is afterwards killed by Desdemona's relatives. Shakespeare has concentrated the story and provided a dramatic ending; but in doing so he has seriously weakened the circumstantial evidence upon which Othello acts. In the original of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Claudio has to wait a year after the final revelation before being allowed to marry Hero; but in the play his outrageous conduct is immediately condoned.[1]

Shakespeare did not write for posterity, or even for publication. He wrote for the theatre of his day. He knew his audiences and his actors, and he made concessions to both, to the detriment of his work. He had neither the self-restraint nor the self-sacrifice of the conscious artist. He cared little for formal completeness or for perfect unity of effect, and rarely consented to subordinate all his detail to his main design. If an episode or a character did not rouse his imagination, he wrote well enough for his audience and was content. From these causes, and not from any deficiency in power or artistic sense, arise the inequalities and defects of Shakespeare's work. Ben Jonson's remark to the effect that his work needed revision was perfectly true.

There is a pestilent idea abroad that Shakespeare is technically difficult. There are people who allow themselves to be frightened by the slight archaism of his language. Others again are alarmed by the quick-set hedge

[1] Compare the condonation of the still more senselessly outrageous behaviour of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*. There is a curious incongruity in Shakespeare's drama between the essential beauty of his women and the suspicion with which they are habitually regarded. Fletcher goes further and makes chastity in women a portent.

raised round the plays by commentators and antiquarians. There are those who suppose that an enormous critical apparatus is necessary for the understanding of Shakespeare. All this is delusion. The understanding of Shakespeare does not depend on apprehension of the meaning of obsolete terms, or appreciation of obscure jests and allusions. The person who can hear the music of Shakespeare's verse will hear it no better for studying its prosody. The delusion, however, that Shakespeare is technically difficult is based upon a fact. A full appreciation of Shakespeare's work as a dramatic artist cannot be based on the text alone. But there are grades of distinction between attempting to scale an Alpine peak without a guide and poring over a contour map in search of an explanation of its beauty. No true lovers of our national poet should fail to explore the sources from which he drew his plots, thereby to derive some idea of the essential magic of the wand with which he touched and re-created his material. A study of the work of his contemporaries, and perhaps, more especially, of his predecessors, will tend to greater clearness in our estimate of his unique greatness. But it remains true that the proper school for the study of Shakespeare is life itself, and the apparatus absolutely necessary is the open eye and the understanding heart.

The great scholars of the eighteenth century have by dint of splendid industry, insufficiently honoured, given us a tolerably good text. Much excellent work in the way of comment and illustration has been done since; but to the text we should go first of all. Difficult Shakespeare of course is; but only in the sense in which all great writers are difficult. If with ludicrous presumption we expect to arrive at a full sense of the greatness of his work at the first or the second reading, we shall be most deservedly disappointed. The more we study the more we shall

understand, and with our knowledge of life will increase our understanding of Shakespeare.

## § 9. *Shakespeareana.*

Shakespeare's plays were first collected and issued in one large volume at the close of 1623, the volume being known from its size as the First Folio: *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies Histories & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies* [Portrait: 'Martin Droeshout sculpsit']. *London, Printed by Isaac Jaggard & Ed. Blount*, 1623. The Folio contains thirty-six plays, arranged as Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. Apart from this arrangement, which was adopted primarily to save time in the printing, and the placing of the English Chronicle Plays in historical sequence, no systematic order seems to have been aimed at. Of the thirty-six plays printed, sixteen, including *Titus Andronicus*, had appeared previously in Quarto form. The stationer who held the printing rights over *Pericles* may have prevented that piece from being included. The remaining twenty plays appeared for the first time.[1] Two fellow-actors of Shakespeare's, John Heminge and Henry Condell, supplied a portion of the new material from prompt-copies; texts of other plays were printed from transcripts in private hands. Most of the plays that had already appeared were printed from the existing quartos. Some of these were sufficiently good to be used in the theatre, but others were notoriously corrupt and for these substitutes had to be found. The printing seems to have been hurriedly and carelessly done. For this Heminge and Condell were not directly responsible, but the five associated printers or booksellers (Wm. and Is. Jaggard, Wm. Aspley, Jn. Smethwick, and Ed. Blount) who 'promoted' the undertaking. A second edition, the Second Folio, appeared in 1632; the Third Folio (two impressions), 1663-4; the Fourth

[1] Even when Playbook or Quarto copies exist, the Folio often supplements them in a very important manner. The best texts as a rule are those in which Quarto and Folio agree, *e.g.*, *Much Ado*, The worst are those in which they most diverge, viz., *Richard III.*, *Merry Wives*, *Henry V.*, *Hamlet.*

Folio, 1685. These last two impressions include as by Shakespeare *Pericles*, *The London Prodigal*, *History of Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Puritan Widow*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The Tragedy of Locrine*. In the first-named of these alone had Shakespeare really any share.

The text of Shakespeare had not improved during the seventeenth century, but had rather grown worse, fresh errors creeping into successive Folios. Annotation and revision commenced under Queen Anne, and in the course of the eighteenth century a better text than that of the Folios was gradually recovered. Nicholas Rowe (1709) and Alex. Pope (1725) made a beginning. Rowe attempted a Life of Shakespeare. Pope wrote a fine preface to his edition, in which he spoke of Shakespeare as 'not so much an imitator as an instrument of Nature.' Lewis Theobald exposed some of Pope's blunders in *Shakespeare Restored*, 1726, and produced an edition of his own in 1733. Theobald was a born *emendator* with a classical training. By treating Shakespeare as a classical text, and collating the folio editions with those of the plays which existed in quarto, he achieved some brilliant results. Hanmer (1744) and Warburton (1747) added but little to Theobald.

The antiquarian or black-letter school of Shakespearean annotation sprang up after 1765, when Johnson brought out his substantial edition—the basis of the later *Variorums*. Its disciples began (upon a hint from Farmer) by studying our sixteenth-century literature, and reading, not the classics, but the books that Shakespeare might and probably would have read, in order the better to understand his language and allusions. This led them to the Elizabethan drama as a whole, and to the obscure satires and tracts which throw light upon the social life of Shakespeare's age. The results were made manifest in the editions of Edward Capell (1768), George Steevens (1773, 1778; 'Johnson and Steevens,' 1793), Edmund Malone (1790), and Isaac Reed (1807). These results were combined and embodied in the three *Variorum* editions of 1803, 1813, and 1821. The third of these, known as 'Boswell's Malone,' remains the standard complete annotated edition. The researches of these eighteenth-century editors were reinforced by those of a

large number of critical and independent inquirers; these included:

John Upton: *Critical Observations on Shakespeare.* 1746.

Peter Whalley: *Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare.* 1748.

Zachary Grey: *Critical, Historical, and Explanatory Notes on Shakespeare, with Emendations of the Text and Metre.* 2 vols. 1754.

Thomas Edwards: *Canons of Criticism.* 1748 and 1765. 'Being a supplement to Mr. Warburton's edition of Shakespeare.'

Benjamin Heath: *A Revisal of Shakespeare's Text.* 1765.

Thomas Tyrwhitt: *Observations and Conjectures upon Some Passages of Shakespeare* [Anon.]. 1766.

Richard Farmer: *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare.* 1767. A splendid contribution, to which the *Variorums* owed much.

Edward Capell: *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare* [The School of Shakespeare]. 3 vols. 1775 83.

Maurice Morgann: *Essay on Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff.* 1777.

Martin Sherlock: *Fragment on Shakespeare.* 1785.

John Monck Mason: *Comments on the Last Edition of Shakespeare's Plays.* 1785.

George Chalmers: *Supplemental Apology for Believers in the Shakespeare Papers.* 1799.

Samuel Felton: *Imperfect Hints towards a new edition of Shakespeare.* 1787-8.

Francis Douce: *Illustrations of Shakespeare.* 1807.

Nathan Drake: *Shakespeare and His Times.* 1817.

Most of these investigators and a good many others are cited, and their opinions weighed, in the *prolegomena* to the *Variorum* editions, and in the *prolegomena* to Bell's edition of 1793; while the Shakespeare literature of the whole of the eighteenth century, and the first quarter of the nineteenth, is reviewed in an impartial manner in Nathan Drake's *Memorials of Shakespeare*, 1828, and in Nichol Smith's *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, 1903. In all, rather more than a hundred editions of Shakespeare appeared between 1623 and 1800.

Of the countless nineteenth-century editions, the most generally referred to are the following:

S. W. Singer's 10-vol. edition. Chiswick Press. 1826, 1856.

Charles Knight's *Pictorial* edition. 8 vols. 1838-43.

Alexander Dyce's edition. 6 vols. 1857; 9 vols. 1864-7.

Howard Staunton's edition. 4 vols. 1864.

Grant White's edition. 12 vols. Boston, 1865.

The *Cambridge* edition [ed. W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright]. 9 vols. 1863-6; in 40 vols. 1891-3. (The standard work for collation of the texts.)

W. J. Rolfe's American edition. 40 vols. 1870-96.

H. H. Furness's *New Variorum* edition (Philadelphia). 13 vols. 1871-1901 (in progress).

The *Globe* edition. 1 vol., with Cambridge text (slightly modified). 1864. (The standard of reference for acts, scenes, and lines.)

The *Leopold Shakespeare*. 1 vol., illustrated, with the text of Delius (1869) and valuable introduction by Dr. Furnivall (1877).

The *Henry Irving* edition. In 8 vols., illustrated, with useful notes on stage history and words peculiar to each play. 1888-90.

The *Eversley Shakespeare*. Edited by Professor Herford, with forewords to each play and succinct annotations. 10 vols. 1899.

The *Bankside* edition. With special essays and parallel texts, Quarto and Folio. 20 vols. New York, 1888-92 (in progress).

The *Temple Shakespeare*. With condensed prefaces and notes by Israel Gollancz. 40 vols. 1894-6. 12 vols., revised, 1900.

The *Windsor* [Harvard] *Shakespeare*. Edited by H. N. Hudson.

The *Elizabethan Shakespeare*. From the First Folio Text. With Introductions of value by W. H. Hudson (in progress).

The *Caxton Shakespeare*. Glossary and Notes by S. Lee.

The *Arden Shakespeare*. Edited by W. J. Craig, with textual apparatus, notes, and introductions (progressing); and the *Little Quarto Shakespeare*, by the same Editor (40 vols.).[1]

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[1] Among the students' editions of single plays, with *variorum* notes, the most deservedly popular (in order of elaborateness) are: The *Clarendon Press* selected plays, ed. Aldis Wright and Clark, 18 vols., 1868-98; the *Warwick Shakespeare*, 17 select plays, 1893-1902; the *Pitt Press Shakespeare*, 13 select plays, ed. A. W. Verity,

The chief original advance made in Shakespeare study during the nineteenth century has been in the direction of the phraseology, grammar, and metre of Shakespeare. The minute investigation of Shakespeare's language and syntax has emphasized the need of a strict conservatism with regard to the emendation of the text—a principle which eighteenth-century critics, whose acumen was often far in excess of their knowledge, were much too apt to ignore. Results of these investigations are to a certain extent summarized in such works as Halliwell's *Handbook Index to Shakespeare*,[1] Alexander Schmidt's *Shakespeare Lexicon* (1874), John Bartlett's *Concordance* to the Plays and Poems (1895), and Abbot's *Shakespearian Grammar* (cf. Franz's *Shakesp. Grammatik*). The study of Shakespearean metre, inaugurated by W. Sidney Walker in *Shakespeare's Versification*, 1854, and Charles Bathurst's *Difference in Shakespeare's Versification at Different Periods of his Life*, 1857, has led, in the hands of Ingram, Fleay, and Furnivall, to valuable results in connexion with the systematic investigation of the chronology of the plays and their dates of composition, a subject which had first been seriously approached by Edmund Malone.[2] The results of these investigations were skilfully summed up, in 1878, by H. P. Stokes in his *Attempt to Determine the Chronological Order of Shakespeare's Plays*. The species of evidence upon which his results are based may be roughly classified as follows: (1) external evidence; (2) internal allusions; (3) style (words,

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1895-1902, and *Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 1875; the *Falcon Shakespeare*, 13 select plays, 1886-1901; *Arnold's School Shakespeare*, ed. J. Churton Collins, 13 select plays, 1894-7. Many others. Unhappily these editions always embrace the same plays. They do the Histories pretty completely; but from the Comedies invariably exclude *Love's Labour's Lost*, *All's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Merry Wives*, *Shrew*, *Errors*, and *Winter's Tale*; and, from the Tragedies, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

[1] Cf. works by Fleay, F. M. O'Connor, Cowden Clarke, John Phin, and Morton Luce (Bell), 1906.

[2] It has been much elucidated by Prof. Arber's issue of the 'Stationers' Registers' and by Henslowe's *Diary*, of which a critical edition by Mr. W. W. Greg is in progress.

classical allusions, prose, puns, thought drawn out or packed); (4) versification (declension of rhyme and end-pause, increase of redundant syllables, short lines, etc.); (5) characterization and quality of thought. The results obtained, though seldom conclusive, are interesting, and are often of independent value.[1] As to the date of some plays, there is an agreement amounting almost to unanimity between the successive dynasties of Shakespeare scholars. The following dates may, perhaps, be regarded as almost certain:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Comedy of Errors* . . . | 1591 | *Twelfth Night* . . . . | 1601 |
| *Henry IV.* . . . . . | 1597-8 | *Measure for Measure* . | 1603-4 |
| *Henry V.* . . . . . | 1599 | *King Lear* . . . . . | 1605-6 |
| *As You Like It* . . | 1599-1600 | *Macbeth* . . . . . | 1606 |
| *Much Ado* . . . | 1599-1600 | *Winter's Tale* . . . . | 1611 |

The greatest diversity of opinion exists in regard to the date of the following:

*Romeo and Juliet.* Malone says 1596; Chalmers, 1592; Drake, 1593; Delius, 1591; Fleay, 1592; N. Shaks. Soc., 1591-3; Stokes, 1591-2; Herford, 1594-5; Lee, 1592.

*Midsummer Night's Dream.* Malone, 1594; Chalmers, 1598; Drake, 1593; Gervinus, 1595; Delius, 1595; Fleay, 1592; N. Shaks. Soc., 1590-91; Stokes, 1595; Herford, 1593-5; Dowden, 1589; Ward, 1594-5; Lee, 1594-5.

*All's Well that Ends Well.* Malone, 1606; Chalmers, 1599; Drake, 1598; Delius, 1596-9; Fleay, 1604; N. Shaks. Soc., 1589, 1601; Stokes, 1592-1604; Lee, 1595.

In the case of *Twelfth Night* the eighteenth-century authorities were almost unanimous in fixing its date as 1613-14; by modern chronologers, upon new evidence (Manningham's *Diary*), it is almost conclusively assigned to 1601.

In other respects than language and metre, the Shakespeare students of the nineteenth century were content for the most

[1] See remarks on *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, p. 64.

part to burrow from the shafts first sunk by their predecessors in the eighteenth. They have penetrated with success, however, in more directions than one.

To the knowledge gleaned with such difficulty by Steevens and the other *variorum* editors as to the sources from which Shakespeare drew his plots, much has been added by the labours of the Shakespeare Society (1841-53) and the later New Shakspere Society, while the study of Shakespeare's treatment of material has been greatly facilitated by such works as Collier and Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*, 1875,[1] Skeat's *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, 1875, and Boswell-Stone's *Shakspere's Holinshed*, 1896 (see also Anders, *Shakespeare's Books*, 1903).

The collation of the Quarto or Play Books with the Folios, similar to that inaugurated by Theobald and improved upon by Capell, but much more systematic and minute than that of either, when combined with an improved knowledge of Shakespeare's diction and rhythm, has led, in the hands of Walker and Ingleby, the Cambridge editors (Messrs. Aldis Wright and Clark), and the great Quarto editor, Mr. P. A. Daniel, to some judicious restorations of the text and to a much more circumspect attitude in regard to textual emendation, than had previously been consistent with the state of our knowledge. As the simplicity and directness of Shakespeare's art is better understood, the more conservative in this respect shall we become.[2]

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[1] A Collection of Plays, Romances, Novels, Poems and Histories, employed by Shakespeare, thus affording a synthetic view of his Materials. It is a valuable supplement to, but must not be regarded as superseding, the *Illustrations* of Douce or the *New Illustrations* (1845) of Joseph Hunter. For the 'stories' of the plays let us not omit to mention Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), or the more systematic but charming *Shakespeare Story-Book* (1902) by Mary Macleod.

[2] This tendency will be accentuated by the increasing regard shown for the First Folio, illustrated by the sumptuous facsimile of it issued by the Clarendon Press, December, 1902. See the recent and most conservative edition of *Macbeth*, by Alexandre Beljame, who has edited on like principles *Julius Cæsar* and *Othello*.

The outlines of Shakespeare's life and the character of his environment, as originally sketched out by Rowe and Malone, have been filled in and elaborated with no less success by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps in his *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, 1881, and by Mr. Sidney Lee in his standard *Life of William Shakespeare*, 1898.[1] Among the best Lives from abroad are those of Elze (1876), Guizot (1852), Mezières (1860), Brandes (1898), and Garlanda (1910).

With the nineteenth century, also, came a shifting of the point of view of Shakespearean criticism. The eighteenth century knew that Shakespeare was a great dramatist of extraordinary intellect: Goethe and Coleridge discovered in him the greatest of poetic artists. The new criticism was the counterpart of the romantic movement in literature. Nineteenth-century critics found in Shakespeare what they looked for: romance, the sense of mystery, verbal music, intensity of poetic imagination, beauty as a result. The work of Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt has been worthily continued by Ruskin, Dowden, Swinburne, Lowell, Courthope, and Wyndham. In Germany cyclopean work has been done;[2] but German criticism is to a great extent vitiated by its desire to find symbolism and, still more, by its search after ethical import. In France an admirable school of Shakespearean criticism has grown up, represented by Villemain, Montégut, Chasles, Hugo, Mezières Stapfer, Beljame, and Jusserand. See Note p. 42.

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[1] To this last the student is specially indebted for dissevering fact from fiction in regard to Shakespeare's ascertained career, and for clearing the Shakespearean forest of the dense undergrowth by which every pathway and avenue of approach to the poet was encumbered. To the same work we must also refer our readers for full details of Shakespeare on the stage, in translation, in controversy, at home (Stratford), and abroad. It has been mainly criticized by Greenwood and others for its over-positiveness.

[2] See the *Jahrbuch der deutschen Sh.-Gesellschaft* (Bibliography in vol. 24). As good examples of Shakespeare criticism in Germany, see the *Vorlesungen* of Kreyssig, and F. T. Vischer. One of the patriarchs of aesthetic criticism is A. W. von Schlegel, and the best translation of Shakespeare into a foreign tongue is the German version of Schlegel and Tieck. A. Brandl's work on Shakespeare is first-rate.

The intensity with which Shakespeare study has been pursued for now over a hundred and fifty years has led to bitter feuds, animosities, and rivalries among a perfect army of critics, investigators, and theorists. So *exalté* has been the enthusiasm of some of the last that they have not hesitated to fabricate evidence in support of their particular 'views'; and few, perhaps, have emerged from controversy on the subject who have not been scathed to the extent of stating as facts what they knew to be merely conjectures. The assiduity no less than the detachment of Shakespeare scholars has led to their subject assuming the appearance of a completely independent branch of study. It already possesses a literature the completeness of which any science might envy.

For a preliminary *coup d'œil* over this wide expanse, the student cannot do better than go to the classified list drawn up by Mr. H. R. Tedder for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (art. Shakespeare, 9th edition). The Select Bibliography there given is classified under twenty-one heads:

1. Editions. 2. Selections. 3. Translations. 4. Criticism and Illustration: (*a*) General; (*b*) Special works on separate plays; (*c*) Falstaff. 5. Language, Grammars, etc. 6. Quotations. 7. Concordances. 8. Sources. 9. Special Knowledge of Shakespeare. 10. Periodicals. 11. Shakespeare Societies. 12. Shakespeare Music. 13. Pictorial Illustration. 14. Biography: (*a*) General; (*b*) Special points. 15. Portraits. 16. Literary and Dramatic History. 17. Shakespeare Jubilees. 18. Ireland Controversy. 19. Payne-Collier Controversy. 20. Shakespeare-Bacon Controversy.[1] 21. Bibliography. To these, on a new classification, would probably be added such headings as Sonnets, Hamlet, and Doubtful Plays.

Beyond this the most useful guides will probably be found to

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[1] On this subject see G. K. Fortescue, *Subject Index*, Brit. Mus., 1902, *s. v.* Bacon: also W. Willis's amusing Trial of the Shakespeare-Bacon Issue in Westminster Hall, 1902 (with a useful appendix of quarto title-pages); cf. Andrew Lang, *The Valet's Tragedy and other Studies*, p. 312; Churton Collins, *Shakespeare Studies*, 1904; Jacob Schipper, *Shakspere-Bacon Frage*, 1889; G. Greenwood, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, 1908.

be the Catalogues of the specialized Shakespeare Collections. The most complete of these are: the Catalogue of entries under Shakespeare (now over 4,000) in the British Museum Library; the Catalogue of the Barton Collection (Boston Public Library), printed in 1888, with 2,400 entries, representing over 5,000 volumes; the Catalogue of the Shakespeare Library at Birmingham (J. R. Mullins, 1872; Index, 1900); the Catalogue of the Memorial Library at Stratford-on-Avon (by J. Hopper, 1868). There are also Shakespeare collections at Weimar, in the Cambridge Free Library, and probably in many other places. The references to Shakespeare in the Guildhall Library Catalogue, in Allibone, Lowndes's *Bibliographer's Manual*, in the Boston Athenaeum Library Catalogue, and in the London Library Catalogue will also be found very useful. A really full Bibliography of Shakespeare remains a desideratum; much, however, has been done in the successive *Shakespeare-Bibliographies* (down to 1900) of Albert Cohn, issued in the form of supplements to the *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* (Berlin). For a Bibliography of existing Bibliographies of the subject the student is referred to Mr. W. P. Courtney's *Register of National Biography*, 1905. See also among other recent works: *Cambridge History of English Lit.*, vol. v; *Encycl. Britannica* (eleventh ed.); Geo. Pierce Baker, *Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*, 1907 (11765, pp. 2); Felix Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, 2 vols., 1908; A. W. Pollard's *Shakespeare's Folios and Quartos* (Methuen), 1909.

NOTE. To the names of English Shakespearean critics mentioned on p. 140 should be added those of Prof. A. C. Bradley, Sir W. Raleigh, Stopford Brooke, and Frank Harris.

## CHAPTER III.

THE POST-SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA—SHAKESPEARE'S LATER CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS.

§ 1. *Introductory.*—§ 2. *Beaumont and Fletcher.*—§ 3. *Dekker, Middleton, and Heywood.*—§ 4. *Webster and Tourneur.*—§ 5. *Marston. Chapman.*—§ 6. *Ben Jonson.*

### § 1. *Introductory.*

In the eighteenth century the writings of the minor Elizabethan dramatists, of all the dramatists, that is, save only Shakespeare and Jonson, were almost ignored except by literary antiquaries.[1] Even Malone and Steevens studied them chiefly with a view to throwing light upon Shakespeare. Shakespeare was conceived as standing practically alone, a mountain amid hillocks. It seems astonishing that an age which loved and reverenced Shakespeare should have altogether failed to appreciate Webster or Fletcher. But so it was. This failure was due partly to that lack of historical sense which allowed of the study of a great writer without correlative study of the sources of his technique and of the analogous work of his contemporaries. It was also due partly to the actual inferiority of the minor Elizabethan dramatists, and partly to the nature of their excellences.

[1] Various plays, however, not only of Jonson, but also of Fletcher and Massinger, kept the stage till towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Then came Charles Lamb with his infallible sensitiveness to beauty and terror in literature, and his love of antique folios. His *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* contemporary with Shakespeare appeared in 1808. He wrote with the enthusiasm of a lover and of a discoverer, and his work was the starting-point of an extraordinary revival of interest in these writers.

But in truth Lamb was merely the instrument of the romantic movement in literature. It was the mental change which produced and which gained recognition for Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, that revived the study and the love of Elizabethan drama as a whole. The eighteenth century had loved and admired Shakespeare, but it had understood him only in part. It had admired his dramatic power, his spectacular quality, his humour, his characterization, his versatility, his pervading intellectuality, and it had reverently restored his text and studied his language. But it is probable that it had failed to appreciate the highest poetical qualities of his writings. The criticism of the eighteenth century is mainly textual, and it affords gross instances of lack of understanding. It significantly neglected the sonnets. Popular as Shakespeare was on the stage at that time, it must not be forgotten that he was played chiefly in hideous versions, some of which show a signal lack of appreciation. And it is noteworthy that the earliest English criticism which dealt with Shakespeare's work as primarily poetic is that of Coleridge and Hazlitt.

Since those days the wonderful industry of modern editors has given us complete and elaborately commentated texts of all but the most obscure of Elizabethan dramatists. An enormous amount of research has been devoted to their texts, their literary relations, their lives, and attempts have even been made to popularize them. The

eulogies of Lamb, enthusiastically expanded by Mr. Swinburne, have been echoed by a crowd of lesser critics. The lyrical school of criticism has almost exhausted the language of eulogy in their praise. Along with the enthusiasm of the romanticists and impressionists in criticism has developed the enthusiasm of the antiquary and the scholar; the enthusiasm of the specialist student, who takes for granted the extraordinary literary value of the work, the sources, relations, and technique of which he studies with so much loving minuteness. There is, of necessity, in the mind of such a specialist a tendency to exaggerate the importance and value of the author, or school of authors, to which he devotes his time and labour. But it seems at least doubtful whether the labour expended on these writers has not to a certain extent been wasted, whether most of it should not rank simply as respectable antiquarianism, whether the praise bestowed by the nineteenth century on the minor Elizabethan dramatists is not as exaggerated as was the depreciation of the eighteenth.

The authority of Lamb has justly had great weight in this matter. But Lamb, inevitably responsive to beauty in literature as he was, seems to have had little power of judging of a play as a whole. The very intensity and delicacy of this response tended to mislead his judgement of a play in which passages of beauty or of impressive power occurred. But the occurrence of such passages is consistent with childish construction of a plot ridiculous or revolting, or both, with an entire absence of power in characterization, with moral dullness or brutality, and with an outrageous lack of humour and of common sense. These things are incompatible with great drama. And it is just such a combination that is characteristic of the work of the minor Elizabethan dramatists.

No one nowadays would deny that, even putting aside Shakespeare and Jonson, the later Elizabethan or, strictly, Jacobean drama is remarkable for its variety and its strength. It has the splendid vitality, the joy and carelessness, the freedom and audacity and idealism of youth. It is strewn with jewels of imagination, it is full of the mystery and horror of unrestrained passion. There is something in it for all tastes: brilliant or striking character sketches and pictures of manners, wide-reaching thought, piercing aphorism, lyrical flights, cynicism, rhetoric, passion, farce. It is brilliantly rhetorical with Beaumont, gay with Fletcher or Day, melancholy with Webster, savage with Tourneur. It is unmatched in a combination of vigour and audacity. Over and above its value as drama, it is in such close touch with the life of the time it sprang from as to illustrate that life with a vividness that must ever be the delight of the antiquary or the historian. Its plots are very largely exotic, and founded on popular tales from Italy; but the life depicted is English so far as it is anything, and highly suggestive of Elizabethan England. There is nothing academic about it, no writing to patterns fabricated in a study. Its historical interest is not, of course, to be reckoned in the sum of its literary merits, since an execrably bad drama might be of high interest to the historian; but there can be no doubt that its vitality is largely due to an actuality which constantly makes itself felt in spite of crudity and extravagance.

But it is a drama of passages, of passionate or joyous moments, of inspirational flashes. It is amazingly unequal, crude, careless, and wayward. Putting Shakespeare and Ben Jonson aside, we doubt if there be a single play of any serious pretension which is not disfigured by faults so gross as to be almost damning. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by its scattered excellences to its

fundamental defects, or to be hypnotized by the chorus of praise which has arisen from its later critics. It is in many respects childish or barbaric. It delights in bloodshed and horror, physical and moral, and in mere violence of action and emotion. It cares little for character, little for plausibility, and not at all for formal completeness or logical development. It revels in coarse farce, and its humour is as a rule as childish as it is gross. Its plots outrage common sense, and constantly exhibit a ludicrously inadequate sense of character. With Webster and Ford and Tourneur it seeks after horror, and finds the grotesque; with Fletcher and Dekker it aspires to the heroic, and becomes hollow and declamatory; it would fain be pathetic, and, as in *Philaster*, it is ridiculous. Shakespeare's creative power combines incongruous elements; in the minor dramatists these elements merely mix. We pass from a tragic and powerful scene to a scene of low comedy so gross and brutal that the impression of its foul silliness clings ever after to our memory of the play. What these writers lack is not the unities, but unity, and they lack it not by reason of mere carelessness of technique, but by reason of defect of conception, a lack of co-ordinative power, or of that artistic sense which, consciously or not, governs all the work of the true artist. What Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare, that he 'wanted art,' is strictly true of these minor dramatists, not merely in the Jonsonian sense, but in one far more essential. Rhetorical and lyrical power, the power of passionate expression and the power of penetrative generalization can adorn but cannot create great drama. The foundations of drama must be laid deep in human nature; for drama is the interaction of character. It is by reason of his grasp of character that, in Shakespeare, the frequent absurdity of plot or situation becomes a thing trivial, or, at any rate, negligible. The essential is always,

or almost always, there. But in the minor Elizabethan dramatists, without exception, in Beaumont, Fletcher, Webster, Middleton, Tourneur, Massinger, Ford, Chapman, Dekker, the power of characterization is small. Rarely, if ever, do they get further than a brilliant sketch or an impressive hint. The foundation is insufficient, or there is no foundation at all. Lacking the power of convincing us of the presence of real men and women, they might have given their puppets a semblance of reality by means of a well-constructed plot. But here they fail utterly. Their construction is even more faulty than their characterization, and even when they happen upon a moderately reasonable plot they go far to ruin it by signal carelessness in the detail. Indifferent characterization may be sustained, and to some extent disguised, by the framework of a well constructed plot; but in the absence of either framework or character the play falls in pieces and becomes a mere patchwork of passages, good, bad, or indifferent.

Critics of the lyrical school, who are emotionalized by the suggestions of imaginative passages to the loss of the balance of judgement, whose imaginations supply the deficiencies of their author, or whose appreciation of passionate expression and beauty of phrasing is greater than their sense of the real in character and in life, may be content with such a patchwork, and even grow ecstatic in contemplation of it. Yet the demand for coherence and for reality in drama that professes to deal with real human relations seems to be reasonable. It was this lack of rational coherence that caused these dramatists to seem useless and barbarous to the eighteenth century: it was the suggestion of such a lack, joined to a native incapacity to understand the highest beauties of poetry, that caused the eighteenth century to be suspicious even of Shakespeare. And it is vain, it is even absurd, to try to persuade

the reading public of the present day that Webster and Beaumont are great writers, or *The Changeling* and *'Tis Pity* great plays. The public knows better. The minor Elizabethan dramatists are very remarkable writers: poets of more or less power and distinction. But their work is too grossly disfigured and too lacking in essentials ever to be much more than the playground of a few scholars, the pleasure of a few adepts. It is not for nothing that they lay so long in the lumber-room. The eighteenth century was not so far wrong. It is a case of Shakespeare first, Ben Jonson a bad second, and the rest nowhere.

It would be useless to attempt any classification of these writers. We might put Fletcher, Dekker, and Day together, and add to them Middleton and Beaumont; we might put together Webster, Tourneur, and Marston, and add Ford to them; we might place Chapman and Massinger with Jonson. Nothing of any importance would be stated in such a classification, which would in some respects be misleading.

Nor does there appear to be any clear line of progress or of decline traceable among the dramatists of the period after the rise of Shakespeare. The development of Elizabethan dramatic art after the first stages is the development of the art of Shakespeare, in which it culminates. He carries it to a point so far beyond the reach of his contemporaries that when he disappears the difference is enormous. That the drama declines after Shakespeare is a mere truism. Moreover, his work synchronizes very closely with that of most of his contemporary dramatists of any account.[1] He died in 1616. Beaumont died in the same year; Tourneur's work was finished some years previously; Ben Jonson, Webster, and Dekker had done all

[1] See Chronological Table of the more important plays.

their best work before the end of that year; Fletcher died in 1625, and Middleton in 1627. These facts imply at least a temporary decline. But, apart from them, it would be difficult to show that the drama of our period exhibits any distinct tendency to decadence. The pessimism of Webster and Tourneur, their love of horror and gloom, may be regarded as decadent, but cannot reasonably be held to imply the approaching decline of the drama in England. Of the newer men, Ford and D'Avenant exhibited the same symptoms of decadence; but, on the other hand, Massinger was particularly sober and rational.[1] The decline of the drama seems to have been due, immediately, to the disappearance of the great writers, and later, to a great extent, to the growth of Puritanism, with its attendant social and political disturbance.

## § 2. *Beaumont and Fletcher.*

Beaumont and Fletcher.

The body of plays commonly, conveniently, and inaccurately referred to as the works of Beaumont and Fletcher includes all the extant plays of the latter,[2] whether written by him alone, or in collaboration with Beaumont or with others, as well as a few which may have been written by Beaumont alone, and a few in which neither Fletcher nor Beaumont had, perhaps, any share. A collection of these plays was published in folio in 1647, and a more complete edition appeared in 1679. Humphrey Moseley, one of the

[1] Massinger and Ford, though, even chronologically, they fall almost as much within this period as within that which follows, are treated of in the *Age of Milton*.

[2] At all events with the exception of *Henry VIII*. The lost plays of Fletcher are *The History of Cardenio*, registered in 1653 as by him and Shakespeare, and *The Jeweller of Amsterdam*.

publishers of the 1647 folio,[1] states in an introduction that the plays written by Fletcher alone would make a 'just volume,' but does not hint that he had any other collaborator besides Beaumont. Shirley, the dramatist, who acted in some sort as editor of the folio, in an address to the reader is equally silent on this point. Against the implication that there was no other collaborator a protest was made at the time by Sir Aston Cokaine on behalf of Philip Massinger. 'Beaumont of these many writ in few and Massinger in other few,' he declared, in verse addressed to the publishers. Modern research and criticism have proved that Massinger's share in these plays as a whole was perhaps actually larger than that of Beaumont, and that Fletcher collaborated also with Middleton and Rowley, and probably with others.

With regard to comparatively few of these plays is there any external evidence of value as to date or authorship. Some sixteen of them, however, are almost certainly by Fletcher alone, and examination of these reveals marked peculiarities of versification and various tricks of manner. Massinger's style is equally peculiar; and, by comparison and exclusion, Beaumont's work can be determined with some approach to accuracy. Such determination can only be roughly approximate. The internal evidence is partially invalidated by several considerations. Fletcher's own talent was certainly very versatile and adaptable.[2] Moreover, two men writing together will tend, consciously or unconsciously, to adopt each other's methods. Modern poets, in attempting a joint drama, would endeavour con-

[1] The other was Humphrey Robinson.

[2] In *The Faithful Shepherdess* he almost completely abandoned his habitual methods of versification. Had this play not been known to be by Fletcher it would certainly have been 'assigned' to some other writer.

sciously to fuse their work. Elizabethan collaborators frequently made no such attempt: yet they may have done so more often than we are inclined to assume. In any case a scene originally written by one man must frequently have been written over by the other. These considerations should make us very sceptical of any exact attribution of parts in a doubtful play. It must be remembered that a specialist is naturally anxious to reach definite conclusions, and that microscopic examination of evidence tends to magnify it out of all proportion to its actual value. We can rarely be certain of the exact authorship of any particular passage in a doubtful play.[1] The rough but substantial accuracy of the modern division as between Fletcher, Beaumont, and Massinger cannot, indeed, reasonably be doubted. On the other hand the attribution of parts to Rowley, or Field,[2] or Middleton must, in the absence of external evidence, always be regarded with extreme suspicion. There is a certain temptation, when we come upon an evidently inferior scene, to ascribe it, if possible, to some such hack as Rowley or Daborne;[3] but this temptation must be resisted.

[1] Consider the case of *The Honest Man's Fortune*. Fleay assigned definite shares in this play to Fletcher, Massinger, Field, and Daborne. Oliphant, later, declares that Fleay made a lucky guess, for though these four did write the play, 'his division is almost entirely wrong.' Boyle assigned the same play to Fletcher, Massinger, Beaumont, and Tourneur. This is a good illustration of the value of metrical tests.

[2] Nathaniel Field (1587-1633), one of the most celebrated actors of the time, first appeared on the stage as one of the Children of the Queen's Revels. He was the author or joint author of several comedies of some wit: *A Woman is a Weathercock* (1612); *Amends for Ladies* (1618); and, with Massinger, of *The Fatal Dowry* (1632). The first two of these are marked by unusual, if unseemly wit, and ingenious construction.

[3] Robert Daborne (died 1628) collaborated with Field and Mas-

John Fletcher (1579-1625).

John Fletcher, younger son of Richard Fletcher, who acted as chaplain to Mary Stuart in the last days of her life and eventually became Bishop of London, was born at Rye in Sussex, in 1579. Very little of any significance is known of his life. He was educated at Bene't College, Cambridge, and had certainly commenced his literary career in London by the year 1607. It is indeed probable that he began writing for the stage a few years earlier than that. *The Woman's Prize* is assigned by Mr. Thorndike to the year 1604.[1] In any case it was probably in 1607 that his partnership with Francis Beaumont commenced.[2] Beaumont came of an old Leicestershire family, and was the son of Sir Francis Beaumont, Justice of the Common Pleas.[3] From Broadgates Hall (Pembroke), Oxford, he had entered the Inner Temple, and had no doubt speedily abandoned law for play-writing. He died prematurely in 1616 at the age of about thirty, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.[4] Fletcher continued actively engaged in writing for the stage down to the year 1625, when he died of the plague. After the death of Beaumont he worked some-

Francis Beaumont (1585?-1616).

singer for the celebrated Philip Henslowe, manufacturer, moneylender, speculator, and manager of the Rose Theatre in Southwark from 1588 to 1603.

[1] If this be actually Fletcher's first play, the fact that it was written as a sort of sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* is significant of the influence of Shakespeare.

[2] Both of them wrote commendatory verses for the first edition of Jonson's *Volpone* (1607).

[3] Both Beaumont and Fletcher came of poetically inclined families. Giles and Phineas Fletcher were cousins of the dramatist. Beaumont's brother and two of his nephews wrote verse.

[4] The traditions as to the extreme intimacy that existed between Beaumont and Fletcher are part of the legend which made them joint authors of a number of plays they did not write together.

times alone, sometimes in collaboration, more particularly with Massinger.

Fletcher had a share in at least fifty dramas. He must have been a rapid as he certainly was a careless writer. His style is marked by extreme metrical looseness. He generally pauses at the end of his line, but his line-structure is irregular, slovenly, and eccentric. He not infrequently extends his line to twelve, thirteen, or even fourteen syllables; but he writes by preference in hendecasyllabics, a slovenly degradation of blank verse. This was not because he could not write good blank verse of ten-syllable lines, for he occasionally did so.[1] But slipshod methods were natural to him. His redundant syllables are frequently accented, and he has an exasperating trick of adding a perfectly superfluous monosyllable such as 'sir,' to make up his eleven syllables. He is exceedingly fond of writing *'em* for *them*, and *'tis* for *it is*. He uses rhyme but rarely, and writes very rarely in avowed prose.[2] The licence he took with his line made prose almost useless to him; but he sometimes escapes the semblance of prose only by the art of the printer. As thus:

> 'She is my daughter,
> Else would I tell you, sir, she is a mistress
> Both of those manners and that modesty
> You would wonder at: she is no often speaker,
> But, when she does, she speaks well; nor no reveller,
> Yet she can dance and has studied the court elements
> And sings, as some say, handsomely; if a woman
> With the decency of her sex may be a scholar,
> I can assure you, sir, she understands too.'[3]

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[1] Notably in the first two scenes of *The Faithful Shepherdess*.

[2] All the last four acts of *The Faithful Shepherdess* are, however, in rhyme, and a good deal of *Love's Cure* is in prose.

[3] *Wild Goose Chase*, I. iii.

In his more serious dramas and passages he is more careful, but his verse always lacks depth and dignity of cadence.

Of all the minor Elizabethan dramatists Fletcher was the most versatile, the most ingeniously inventive, the most dexterous and light-handed. With his talent for light and graceful lyrical verse, his ingenuity and deftness, his facility and imitative cleverness, were combined a radical frivolity and a moral obtuseness greater than that of any of his contemporaries. This frivolity and lack of moral seriousness is no defect in his work, but is, in fact, its essential quality. In combination with his intellectual qualities it produced a genius for the serio-comic, for farcical comedy and equally farcical romance. If it unfitted him for tragedy it made his comedy funnier than anything in Elizabethan drama outside Shakespeare. The moral unscrupulousness of such plays as *The Custom of the Country*, *The Queen of Corinth*, and *A Wife for a Month* is revolting; but the whimsical fun and pleasant irresponsibility of *Monsieur Thomas* or *The Little French Lawyer* is correlated with the very qualities that made his tragedy or tragi-comedy dull or disgusting. His frivolity is inseparable from his delightfully light touch, and it was his frivolity that gave to such a comic romance as *The Pilgrim* the charm of a funny fairy-tale. He constructed his plays cleverly if carelessly, showing ingenuity and a strong sense of the ludicrous in the contrivance of situation. He wirepulled his puppets with great dexterity into a decent semblance of life. So sprightly are their motions, so vivacious their speech, that one might almost take them for men and women. Some of his character sketches, like that of La Writ in *The Little French Lawyer* are, undeniably, brilliantly clever. Though he never takes his puppets quite seriously he is an admirable showman. But

a radical insincerity marks all his work; and it declares itself unmistakably as soon as he turns from the semi-farcical to romance or to tragedy. He is never dull except when he is labouring to be heroic or pathetic. He was expert in all the tricks of his trade, and could simulate passion decently on occasion. But even his best rhetorical passages ring hollow. The only tragedies he wrote unaided, *Bonduca* and *Valentinian*, serve to bring out his complete incapacity for tragedy. Throughout those two dull plays he declaims and exaggerates, showing little or no sense of character.[1] The result is lifeless where it is not absurd.

That Fletcher was a good deal influenced by Shakespeare there is no doubt. In that respect he resembled almost all his contemporaries. But imitative as his talent was it was essentially inventive, while his native frivolity gave him a real originality. His comedy of manners, satirical without seriousness, realistic and farcical at once, was a new thing on the English stage. *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, and *The Little French Lawyer* are as unlike *Every Man in his Humour* as they are unlike *Much Ado About Nothing*. Equally new was the curious blend of romance and farce that Fletcher's irresponsible cleverness originated. *The Pilgrim* and *The Beggars' Bush* bear a certain resemblance to *As You Like It*. They differ from it in being essentially frivolous and insincere. In *The Pilgrim* it is hard to say whether the shutting-up of Alphonso in the madhouse or the conversion of the outlaw Roderigo be the more farcical. When Fletcher ventured unaided upon pure romance he fell into such extravagance and absurdity as marks *The Island Princess*

[1] See the scene between Valentinian and Lucina in *Valentinian* (III. i.); and, as an instance of utter failure through exaggeration, the scene of Hengo's death in *Bonduca*.

or *The Mad Lover*. There is no writer more radically unromantic than Fletcher.

All the best of the plays for which Fletcher was alone or was mainly responsible are farcical or semi-farcical comedies or romances, with the exception of *The Faithful Shepherdess*.[1] In that idyllic and pastoral drama, and in that alone, his lyrical talent is dominant. The result is a graceful play, full of pretty fancies; affected, but so lightly touched that the affectation is inoffensive and even charming. Elsewhere his lyrical faculty is best expressed in the graceful and charming songs with which the plays are bestrewn.

When Fletcher wrote in collaboration with Beaumont or with Massinger he appears to have taken his tone from the morally stronger man. Beaumont brought into the partnership a moral seriousness deeply stained with sentimentality. Accordingly, in *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *A King and No King*, Fletcherian romance became sentimental and almost tragic. But, since Beaumont had but little sense of character and little care for the actual, it remained inconsequent and, while strongly sentimental, is morally feeble. On the other hand, sober, observant, serious Massinger gave to Fletcherian tragedy a gloom and power entirely absent from *Valentinian*, and to Fletcherian comedy an increased solidity of structure and characterization.

The fame of Francis Beaumont rests upon five plays: *Philaster* (1609), *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610), *A King and No King* (1611), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (published 1613), and *The Scornful Lady* (published 1616). These, pre-eminently, are the plays of Beaumont and

[1] One of the best of Fletcher's purely farcical comedies is *The Wild Goose Chase*, and some of his best comedy is to be found in *The Scornful Lady*, written with Beaumont, and in *The Spanish Curate*, written with Massinger.

Fletcher, and in all of them, except in *The Scornful Lady*, Beaumont's work is predominant.[1] His tendency was towards themes of a sentimentally romantic or semi-tragic character. He wrote a fine, nobly lucid verse, remarkably free from mannerism and often beautifully cadenced. He has great rhetorical power and felicity of phrase, and touches of high imagination. Of all the Elizabethan dramatic poets, putting aside Shakespeare and Jonson, he is perhaps the most consistently fine stylist. On the other hand his characterization is weak, and his conception of plot correspondingly crude and feeble. Arbaces, in *A King and No King*, is a finely imagined character very crudely worked out, and Bessus, in the same play, is not intolerably inferior to Parolles. But for the most part his figures are vague and conventional, while their conduct at critical moments is apt to be unintelligible or ludicrously absurd. His breadth and nobility of diction contrast indeed very strongly with the extravagance or even positive silliness of his plots. In pure comedy, judging by the first two acts of *The Scornful Lady*, he might have done admirably; while in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*[2] he showed a quality of

[1] The first two acts of *The Scornful Lady*, a play popular on the stage after the Restoration, are chiefly Beaumont's, the last three chiefly Fletcher's. Mr. Macaulay in *Francis Beaumont: a Critical Study*, expresses the opinion that *Philaster* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* are entirely Beaumont's work, though other authorities do not fully agree with him. Beaumont, it seems, certainly wrote most of *The Maid's Tragedy* and of *A King and No King*.

[2] This play is astonishingly fresh and funny to-day, in spite of the antiquity of the fashions burlesqued. Its burlesque of 'chivalrous' romance may or may not have been suggested by the English version of *Don Quixote* published in 1612. The publisher of the first edition (1613) declared that the play came first. It failed on the stage when first produced, possibly partly because

humour and a power in burlesque which Fletcher certainly did not possess. His premature death may have deprived us of great things.

A very typical play is *Philaster*, and it will be worth while to examine it a little closely. The silliness of the plot, the absurdity of some of the situations, which in the most seriously conceived passages border on burlesque, the beauty of some of the speeches, the strength of much of the rhetoric, the crudity and vigour of the characterization are typical of Beaumont's work, and, in some degree, of Elizabethan drama. The theme is a romance. From the romantic to the ridiculous there is less than a stride, and in this play the step is taken again and again. Philaster is the son and rightful heir of the late King of Sicily, who, before the play begins, was unrighteously deposed by the late King of Calabria. The successor to this usurper, now King of the Two Sicilies, keeps the natural heir to the Sicilian throne at liberty about his Court, not daring to kill or imprison him for fear of the populace. The King has a daughter, Arethusa, whom he intends to marry to Prince Pharamond of Spain, giving him with her hand the reversion of both the crowns. But Philaster and Arethusa love each other, and so the drama begins.

Act I. i. introduces us to the subject and to most of the principal characters. The exposition is clear and vigorous: the popularity of Philaster, his high spirit, the King's fear of him, the popular dislike of the Spanish marriage, all appear plainly. In Scene ii. Arethusa herself declares to Philaster her love for him. The scene is finely written, and is on the whole the best balanced in the play. There is grace and nobility in the diction, and the

of its ridicule of Heywood's *Four Prentices of London*. *The Woman Hater* (published 1607), of which the point is also burlesque, is perhaps by Beaumont alone.

situation is treated with a fine discretion and without extravagance. The celebrated passage, describing how Philaster found Bellario,

> 'Sitting by a fountain's side,
> Of which he borrowed some to quench his thirst
> And paid the nymph again as much in tears,'

is gracefully phrased, though thoroughly conventional. The lovers arrange that Bellario, now Philaster's page-boy, shall henceforth wait on Arethusa, and act as a go-between.

This arrangement is the beginning of troubles. Bellario is an uncommonly pretty boy, with a graceful melancholy and unmerited misfortunes. He displays an extremely grateful devotion to his master, and, for love of Philaster, his mistress makes much of him. Meanwhile Prince Pharamond lightens the tedium of official courtship by making disgraceful love to Megra, a lady of the Court. Their connexion is discovered at the end of the second act, and the marriage arrangement is at once broken. To save herself from the King's vengeance, Megra then threatens to make public the knowledge she asserts she possesses of the shameful relation existing between Arethusa and Bellario.

Every one is quickly convinced of the truth of her assertions. Certain courtiers hasten to convey the slander to Philaster. They are aware that only his tenderness for the princess prevents him from coming forward to give the signal for a revolution they all desire; a revolution that would at least secure his succession to the throne of Sicily. In order that no doubt may trouble Philaster as to Arethusa's guilt, one of them, an apparently much respected person named Dion, assures the prince that he has personally obtained proof of it, though he dis-

crectly refrains from giving any details. With a touching unsuspiciousness, unusual among men in his peculiar position, Philaster at once believes this extremely improbable assertion. The scene (III. i.) is finely rhetorical. At its close Philaster remarks naïvely:

> 'I had forgot to ask him where he took them.'

He had, in fact, asked no questions whatever. But, absurd as this is, Philaster is only a degree more gullible than Claudio, and no more credulous than Posthumus. It seems to have been almost a recognized convention of the Elizabethan stage that, if any one foully slanders the lady you love, you not only believe the lie, but at once proceed, after little or no inquiry, to the most extreme measures.[1]

Philaster proceeds to interview Bellario. He still forbears asking any pertinent questions; but he tries to entrap Bellario into a confession by declaring that it had been his hope and intention to make Arethusa the boy's mistress: a declaration so patently and ludicrously false that it could hardly have deceived that prince of gulls, Fabian Fitzdottrel himself. This failing he threatens to kill the boy. 'Oh! but thou dost not know what 'tis to die,' he urges; and the answer is fine:

> 'Yes, I do know, my lord:
> 'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep;
> A quiet resting from all jealousy,
> A thing we all pursue; I know, besides,
> It is but giving over of a game
> That must be lost.'[2]

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[1] A very convenient constructive principle for a dramatist who loves the violent, and cares nothing for character and plausibility.

[2] The special appropriateness of Bellario's reference to jealousy will appear in due course.

The prince next visits Arethusa. He gives her no chance of defending herself. He bewails his fate, denounces her, and goes off declaring that he will

> 'Dig a cave and preach to birds and beasts
> What woman is and help to save them from you.'

Apparently he is completely demented. For her part Arethusa, naturally indignant, turns on Bellario and dismisses him from her service. He accepts his dismissal meekly and woefully, and goes forth 'to seek out some forgotten place to die.'

We are gradually rising towards a climax of absurdity; and in the fourth act great heights of farcical tragedy are attained. Philaster and Bellario have alike betaken themselves to a forest near the palace on their several quests, the one for a cave, the other for a place to die in. Shortly after their departure the Court goes a-hunting in the forest. During the hunting Arethusa is missed, and the King, who has previously shown signs of remorse, now shows signs that his mind is completely unhinged. He is furious at being told that kings are only to be obeyed when they command things 'possible and honest,' and threatens to cover all Sicily with blood if his daughter is not found, possibility or impossibility. He asks fiercely whether it is not true that a king's breath can 'uncloud the sun, charm down the swelling sea.' On being informed that nature has not so arranged things, his mood suddenly collapses, and he falls to moralizing. The passage (IV. ii.) is a good example of the extravagance with which Elizabethan dramatists frequently developed an idea.

Philaster, wandering in the forest, finds Bellario and the strayed Arethusa together. His belief in their guilt is of course confirmed. In his despair and self-pity he asks

them to kill him, and this passage is both finely conceived and finely written:

> 'Dear Arethusa, do but take this sword,
> And search how temperate a heart I have;
> Then you and this your boy may live and reign
> In lust without control. Wilt thou, Bellario?
> I prithee kill me; thou art poor and mayst
> Nourish ambitious thoughts; when I am dead
> Thy way were freer. Am I raging now?
> If I were mad I should desire to live.
> Sirs, feel my pulse, whether you have known
> A man in a more equal tune to die.'

The despairing note, the pointed simplicity and admirably broken cadence of this are extremely fine and true, when the situation is granted. As they refuse to kill him, the prince, having sent Bellario away, tells Arethusa that if she will not kill him he must kill her: 'we are two, earth cannot bear at once': and this also is well imagined. But then immediately follows a ludicrous incident. Philaster strikes Arethusa with his sword, and at the critical moment a 'country fellow' intervenes and attacks him The prince is worsted and wounded. 'I must shift for life, though I do loathe it,' he exclaims. 'I would find a course to lose it rather by my will than force.' And with this poor excuse he takes to ignominious flight, our momentary sympathy for him vanishing in laughter as he goes.

In another part of the forest Philaster finds Bellario fast asleep. It at once occurs to the distracted mind of the prince that if he wounds the boy his pursuers will imagine that it was Bellario who injured the princess. He has now begun to doubt whether Arethusa may not be innocent after all, and he has the miserable meanness to count upon her betrayal of the boy, in that case, for the sake of her lover. He strikes at once, and immediately

afterwards falls faint from his own wound. 'I have caught myself!' he exclaims with admirable *naïveté*. The awakened Bellario's self-forgetful desire that he shall escape, convinces him that the boy is true after all; nevertheless he 'creeps into a bush' to hide. Then enter the courtiers. Arethusa, who has meanwhile been found, has refused to say who hurt her. Bellario takes the guilt of the assault on himself, and is about to be carried off as a prisoner. This is too much for Philaster—though he could have expected nothing else. He creeps out of the bush and tells the truth. The act ends with the handing over of the two criminals—they were certainly not both guilty—to Arethusa, that she may 'appoint their tortures and their deaths.'

The noble and eloquent diction of these passages is calculated to blind us to the essential absurdity of the situation. It is not Philaster's conduct that is absurd. His rapid and contradictory impulses, his revulsions of feeling, even his meanness in wounding Bellario and creeping into the bush, may be understood, allowing for a little poetic licence, as part of the mood of a distracted man, and are cleverly imagined if not entirely convincing. But we cannot but remember upon how feeble a basis this distraction rests: the original credulity and impulsiveness that gave rise to it are so preposterous. What, after all, is this distraction about? He knows nothing. Even more essentially absurd seems the position of Bellario. What is he doing in this galley? His very presence is an offence to common sense. His failure to defend himself, his self-forgetful and dog-like and apparently causeless devotion to Philaster!—but evidently the authors hold in reserve an explanation of these mysteries.

The princess avails herself of the opportunity to marry Philaster in his prison, and when he is brought forth to execution she appears before the King as his wife. The

vengeful intents of the enraged monarch are finally frustrated by a timely popular rising on behalf of the endangered prince. The King submits to the declared will of the people with exemplary promptitude, and weeps to think how wicked he has been. He liberates Philaster and recognizes the marriage. But he is still troubled by that scandal concerning Arethusa and Bellario. 'I will have her cleared or buried,' he declares, and orders the boy to be stripped and tortured.

And now the long-reserved explanation of the conduct of Bellario is reached, and with it the climax of absurdity. Bellario is not a boy but a girl, the daughter of Dion, he who slandered the princess, and whose lie now recoils, quite gently, on his own head. She confesses now that it was secret love for Philaster that caused her to seek his service disguised as a boy. All the trouble has arisen because she chose to keep her secret. By doing so she has endangered the life of the princess, the reason of the prince, and the throne of the King. But, as she explains, she had made a vow 'by all the most religious things a maid could call together, never to be known.' This is her only excuse. One might suppose that after this confession she would be whipped and put on bread and water for a month or so; but, says the King:

> 'Search out a match
> Within our kingdom, where and when thou wilt,
> And I will pay thy dowry.'

And, unabashed, she declines the offer:

> 'Never, sir, will I
> Marry: it is a thing within my vow.'

There are absurdities in the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* as great in their way as any here; but none so essential and none so undignified. For in *Philaster* it is

the psychological basis of the play that is absurd; while in the *Merchant* the absurdity is merely circumstantial and external. It is only the casket will and the law of Venice, as exemplified in the trial scene, that are preposterous. It might be urged that *Philaster* is fairy-tale. But fairy-land has its own logic, and regarded as fairy-tale *Philaster* would be even worse than it is as romance. In *As You Like It* Shakespeare unified his fantastic romance and avoided the tragic note in his love-making. *The Tempest* is fairy-tale; and the simply human interest is there strictly subordinated to the conditions of an enchanted island. But the treatment of Philaster's jealousy is perfectly serious, and the fourth act is seriously pathetic in intention. *Philaster* is not a fairy-tale, but a preposterously conceived romance, with an essential element of silliness. In Euphrasia (Bellario) the authors meant to represent a type of romantic devotion to a secret love and a secret vow. We can only say that in doing so they show either a want of the common sense which is the sense of the actual, or a want of sincerity equally damning. The play is only saved from sheer silliness by its noble and eloquent verse. It may be added that the roughest analysis of the other more important tragic or romantic dramas of these writers will reveal similar weaknesses of conception. In *The Maid's Tragedy* Aspatia's conduct is as preposterous as that of Euphrasia, and Evadne's revulsion of feeling is unintelligible and clumsy. It is not that the authors are deficient in stagecraft, for their construction is generally clever if rather careless. But the psychological basis is too weak for the superstructure.

The following division of the 'Beaumont and Fletcher' plays among the authors concerned in them appears to be approximately accurate:

By Fletcher alone.

*The Faithful Shepherdess.* Printed 1610 or earlier. Second edition, 1629. An idyllic, pastoral play of great charm, written, for the most part, in rhyme.

*Monsieur Thomas.* Printed 1639, but probably an early play. A semi-farcical comedy of manners.

*The Chances.* First printed in the 1647 folio. A popular comedy, based on a story of Cervantes, and adapted for the stage by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1682), and by Garrick (1754).

*The Humorous Lieutenant.* Acted 1619: printed 1640. One of the most diverting of Fletcher's farcical comedies. It was several times revived in the eighteenth century.

*Wit without Money.* Written after 1614: printed 1639. A satirical comedy of manners.

*Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.* Acted 1624: printed 1640. A clever and amusing comedy with some resemblance in subject to *The Taming of the Shrew.*

*The Woman's Prize.* Acted at Court as an old play in 1633: 1647, folio. A sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which the tables are turned. Perhaps very early. (1604. Thorndike.)

*The Wild Goose Chase.* Acted at Court 1621: printed 1652. A farcical comedy.

*The Loyal Subject.* Acted 1618: 1647, folio. One of the best of Fletcher's romantic dramas.

*The Mad Lover.* Acted before March, 1619: 1647, folio. A highly absurd but characteristic romantic play.

*The Island Princess.* Acted at Court 1621: printed 1647. A romantic extravaganza.

*The Pilgrim.* Acted at Court 1621: 1647, folio. A semi-farcical romantic comedy. It was a favourite with Coleridge, and was frequently acted in a version by Vanbrugh in the eighteenth century.

*A Wife for a Month.* Acted 1624: 1647, folio. A feebly imagined and curiously ugly tragi-comedy.

*Women Pleased.* Folio, 1647. A slight and feeble tragi-comedy.

*Bonduca.* Acted before March, 1619: 1647, folio. Tragedy.

*Valentinian.* Acted before March, 1619: 1647, folio. Tragedy.

### By Fletcher and Beaumont.

*Four Plays in One.* Perhaps the first work of the authors in collaboration and probably acted in 1608: 1647, folio. Four short pieces represent the 'Triumph' of Honour, Love, Death, and Time, respectively, and are preceded by an induction. The concluding 'Triumph' is a kind of allegorical morality.

*Philaster: or Love lies a Bleeding.* Printed 1620, but acted before 1611, and perhaps as early as 1608.

*A King and No King.* Printed 1619, licensed 1611. Romantic drama.

*The Maid's Tragedy.* Printed 1619, but acted, probably, 1609-10 A tragic romance.

*Cupid's Revenge.* Printed 1615, with Fletcher's name only. Acted 1612, and perhaps as early as 1609. An absurd tragical romance founded on a story in Sidney's *Arcadia* (Bk. II.), and probably mainly Fletcher's.

*The Captain.* Acted at Court 1612-13. A tragi-comedy which appears to be mainly Fletcher's. This contains the lyrical duet: 'Tell me, dearest, what is love?' 'Tis a lightning from above.' Printed 1647, folio.

*The Scornful Lady.* Printed 1616. An adaptation of this comedy was produced on the stage in 1783.

*The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* Printed 1613: written 1611 or earlier. A burlesque and satirical comedy.

*The Woman Hater.* Printed as 'lately acted' in 1607. A burlesque comedy which is perhaps all Beaumont's.

### By Fletcher and Massinger.

*Sir John van Olden Barnavelt.* Acted, with great success, on account of its topical character, in August, 1619. An historical tragedy of contemporary politics. First printed in A. H. Bullen's *Collection of Old English Plays* (1884-5), vol. ii.

*Thierry and Theodoret.* Printed anonymously 1621. Tragedy.

*The Double Marriage.* Acted 1619 (?): 1647, folio. A tragi-comedy.

*The Queen of Corinth.* Acted 1618: 1647, folio. A very unpleasant tragi-comedy. It has the beautiful lyric: 'Weep no more, nor sigh, nor groan.'

*The Laws of Candy.* 1647, folio. A romantic drama which seems to be mainly Massinger's.

*The Sea Voyage.* Acted 1622: 1647, folio. An extravagant, romantic drama, to some extent suggested by *The Tempest.* Our text perhaps represents a play of Fletcher's revised by Massinger.

*The Prophetess.* Acted 1622: 1647, folio. A romantic and spectacular drama.

*The False One.* Acted 1620: 1647, folio. A romantic drama, dealing with the events treated in Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra.*

*The Custom of the Country.* Acted as an old play in 1628: perhaps really as early as 1619: 1647, folio. A clever and licentious romantic comedy which is perhaps entirely Fletcher's.

*The Elder Brother.* A late comedy, printed as by Fletcher alone in 1637.

*The Spanish Curate.* Acted 1622: 1647, folio. A brilliant comedy, though unequally written and poorly constructed.

*The Little French Lawyer.* About 1620: 1647, folio. A satirical and semi-farcical comedy, of which versions were frequently put on the stage in the eighteenth century.

By Fletcher and Rowley.

*The Maid in the Mill.* Acted at Court 1623: 1647, folio. A coarse and feeble comedy.

*The Fair Maid of the Inn.* Acted at Court 1626: 1647, folio. A badly constructed romantic comedy, in which Massinger may have had a share.

By Fletcher and Shirley.

*The Night Walker.* Acted 1634 as a work of Fletcher, revised by Shirley. Printed 1640.

By Fletcher and Middleton.

*The Nice Valour.* This probably represents a comparatively early comedy by Fletcher, as revised by Middleton and printed in the 1647 folio. The songs, including the well-known one beginning 'Hence, all you vain delights' (Act III. iii.), are almost certainly Fletcher's.

### By Fletcher and Shakespeare.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen.* Acted 1613 (?): printed 1634, as by Fletcher and Shakespeare. It seems probable, though far from certain, that Shakespeare wrote parts of this romantic drama. We know of no one else who could have written the first scene of the play and the invocation to Mars in Act V. i. The theory that these and other passages were written by Massinger is extremely unlikely. It involves the supposition that, after far surpassing in this play anything he ever wrote elsewhere, Massinger allowed it to be published in Shakespeare's name. As a whole, the play is a characteristic Fletcherian romance, the most distinctively Shakespearean passages fitting very badly into the structure. (See Chapter II., § 5.)

### Plays generally considered as of Doubtful or Very Mixed Authorship.

*The Beggars' Bush.* Acted at Court 1622: printed 1647, and separately, 1661. The authorship of this charming little romantic comedy, which Coleridge called 'sylvan and sunshiny,' declaring that he could read it all day, has been disputed. There seems no reason to doubt that it is substantially Fletcher's, though there are passages that strongly suggest Middleton.

*Love's Pilgrimage.* Acted as a 'renewed' play 1636: printed 1647. A romantic comedy. The reviser, whoever he was, inserted in the first scene two passages from Jonson's *New Inn.*

*The Lover's Progress.* 1647, folio. A romantic drama, acted as a revised play in 1634. The reviser may have been Massinger.

*The Coxcomb.* Acted at Court 1612-13, and perhaps produced as early as 1609: printed 1647. A romantic comedy which perhaps belongs to Fletcher and Beaumont simply. Critics have vainly endeavoured to distinguish in it the work of Fletcher, Beaumont, Massinger, Middleton, Rowley, and Jonson.

*The Honest Man's Fortune.* Acted 1613 (?): 1647, folio. It

appears to be generally agreed that the last act of this comedy is by Fletcher. Nothing is known as to the authorship of the earlier portion of the play.

*The Knight of Malta.* Acted 1618: 1647, folio. The best of the tragi-comedies in which Fletcher was concerned. The authorship of the first and last acts is disputed.

*The Bloody Brother.* A tragic drama, printed in 1639 as by B. J. F. (Ben Jonson and Fletcher), and in 1640 published as by Fletcher only. This unequal but striking play may actually be the work of Fletcher and Jonson.

*The Noble Gentleman.* Acted 1626: 1647, folio. A satirical farce which is probably mainly Fletcher's.

*Wit at Several Weapons.* Folio, 1647. A feeble farcical comedy of doubtful authorship. Perhaps very early. (1605. Thorndike.)

*Love's Cure.* Folio, 1647. A coarse and extravagant comedy of very doubtful authorship. It is possible that Fletcher had no part in this. It is partly written in prose.

*The Faithful Friends.* This romantic drama was entered on the Stationers' Registers in 1660 as by Beaumont and Fletcher. Neither of them seems to have had any hand in it. It has been rashly ascribed to Daborne.

### § 3. *Dekker, Middleton, and Heywood.*

Thomas Dekker (1570?-1640?).

Thomas Dekker was born and died no one knows exactly when or where. Hardly anything is known of his life, but he was certainly a literary hack of all work, and he seems to have oscillated between the tavern and the debtors' prison, and to have been well acquainted with the lowest life of London. He is stated, on the authority of Oldys, to have been a prisoner in the King's Bench from 1613 to 1616. As hasty as he was versatile in composition, he was possessed of an enormous fund of interest in life and of natural gaiety, which kept his writings fresh to

the last. He composed plays, pageants for the Lord Mayor, prose pamphlets, and lyric and miscellaneous verse. His prose is mainly humorous or satirical, or simply fantastic, and deals, like his plays, picturesquely and with abundance of detail with the London life of his day.[1] He even wrote a book of prayers, in which modern critics find profound devotional expression.[2] His earliest literary work appears to date from 1597, in which year he was writing for Henslowe. His earliest extant play is *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599, printed 1600). His best plays are *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, *Old Fortunatus* (published 1600), *The Honest Whore* (of which the first part was published in 1604, and the second in 1630), and *Match Me in London* (1631); but some of his best dramatic work appears in *The Virgin Martyr* (1622), which he wrote with Massinger, and in *The Sun's Darling* and *The Witch of Edmonton*, in which he collaborated with Ford and Rowley. He collaborated also with Drayton and Munday, Jonson (*Robert the Second*), Chettle,[3] Haughton and Day, Webster

[1] His most important prose pamphlet is *The Gull's Horn Book* (1609).

[2] *The Four Birds of Noah's Ark* (1616).

[3] Henry Chettle (died 1607) edited Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), had an obscure quarrel with Nash, and published a volume, *England's Mourning Garment*, upon Elizabeth's death. A hack of the theatres who wrote chiefly in collaboration, his only extant separate play out of thirteen is *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1602, published 1631). He took part in thirty-six other plays, of which only four were printed. William Haughton (flourished 1597-1602), another of Henslowe's hacks, was the sole author of *Englishmen for my money*, and did a good deal of play-writing in collaboration down to 1602, after which he is no more heard of. In May, 1599, he received five shillings from Henslowe 'in earnest of a book which he would call *The Devil and his Dame*.' It was in conjunction with Chettle and Haughton that Dekker produced *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissil*, printed in 1603, the

(*Northward Ho*, *Westward Ho*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*), and Middleton (*The Roaring Girl*). In September, 1601, he produced *Satiro-mastix, or The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet*,[1] a burlesque play in ridicule of Ben Jonson and an answer to *The Poetaster*.

Dekker is a humorous and good-humoured realist, with a fantastic lyrical vein. He is one of the few Elizabethan

sweet lullaby song in which, 'Golden slumber kisse your eyes,' was undoubtedly Dekker's. For Day see p. 175. Still another of these hacks was Wentworth Smith (flourished 1601-1623).

[1] A very amusing account of this play is given in Disraeli's *Quarrels of Authors*. The following is a list of Dekker's plays from R. H. Shepherd's Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, 4 vols., 1873. The order is approximately chronological in regard to stage-production, but the dates given are those of *publication*:

| By Dekker alone. | |
|---|---|
| *Shomakers Holiday* . . | 1600 |
| *Old Fortunatus*. . . . | 1600 |
| **Satiro-mastix* . . . . | 1602 |
| *The Honest Whore*, I. . | 1604 |
| *The Honest Whore*, II. . | 1630 |
| *The Whore of Babylon* . | 1607 |
| *If it be not Good, the Divel is in it* . . . . | 1612 |
| *A Tragi-Comedy called Match Mee in London*. | 1631 |
| *The Wonder of a Kingdome*. . . . . | 1636 |

| In Collaboration. | | |
|---|---|---|
| *West-Ward Hoe* | Dekker, Webster | 1607 |
| *North-Ward Hoe* | Dekker, Webster | 1607 |
| *Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyat* | Dekker, Webster | 1607 |
| *The Roaring Girle, or Moll Cut-Purse* | Middleton, Dekker | 1611 |
| *The Virgin Martir* | Massinger, Dekker | 1622 |
| *The Witch of Edmonton* | Rowley, Dekker, Ford | 1658 |
| *The Sun's-Darling, A Moral Masque* | Ford, Dekker | 1656 |

* For further details of Dekker's counter to *The Poetaster* see R. A. Small's *Stage Quarrel between Ben Jonson and the Poetasters* (1899) and Wyndham's *Poems of Shakespeare* (1898), Introduction.

playwrights who habitually founded their plays on the actual life they saw around them. All his best plays have some flavour of real life[1] except *Old Fortunatus*, which is a lyrical and humorous extravaganza on a theme resembling that of Marlowe's *Faustus*. At his best he has a power of vivid characterization, and his best plays abound in realistic touches that to some minds are worth reams of admirable rhetoric. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is a comedy of jollity and high spirits rather than of humour, but the figure of Simon Eyre is vigorously detached. The songs in both these pieces are delightful, and few plays are richer in this respect than the 'pleasant comedie of the Gentle Craft,' with its

'O the month of Maie, the merrie month of Maie,'

and

'Trowle the boll, the jolly Nut-browne boll.

The most ambitious of Dekker's productions and the most completely characteristic, exhibiting as it does all his strength and all his weakness, is *The Honest Whore*. Of the two parts of this play the second is by far the stronger. Here Dekker is at his best in the portrait of Orlando Friscobaldo, humorous misanthropist and cynic by profession, soft hearted and simple old gentleman in fact. The figure of Matheo, the rascally husband who will pawn his wife's clothes for the gaming table, is hardly less good. On the other hand the character of the virtuous heroine is conventionally conceived and insincerely rendered, while the whole play is marred by the execrable ribaldry of the closing scene. Dekker uses prose largely; and his verse is easy, conversational, and irregular in structure, but occasionally has fine metrical

[1] *The Honest Whore* is no exception, in spite of its Italian names.

and rhythmical qualities, though it is rarely well-balanced. The songs interspersed in his plays are invariably good;[1] light in touch, thoroughly lyrical in spirit and in movement, and with a marked individuality. It is probable that he was essentially an improviser, and at his best when writing most easily. When he especially wishes to be impressive he falls into undignified rhyme and becomes conventional, as in the argument between Bellafront and Hippolito in *The Honest Whore* (IV. i.).

John Day (1574-1640?).

John Day is a writer whose works have only been made accessible by the spirited industry of a modern editor.[2] As a dramatist and lyrist he was decidedly superior to the Haughtons and Dabornes, and had a very distinct individuality. Hardly anything is known of his life, but he was one of Henslowe's hacks, and had a hand in twenty odd plays between 1599 and 1602. All his published work, with the doubtful exception of *The Parliament of Bees*, dates from before 1608. He wrote chiefly in collaboration with Haughton, Dekker, and Rowley. He had a pretty wit, great lightness of touch, a talent for light lyrical verse, trivial but dainty, and a frolicsome manner of some charm. His qualities are best displayed, perhaps, in his *Ile of Guls* (1606), which shows the influence of *Arcadia*, of Lyly, and of Shakespeare. *The Parliament of Bees* is not a play, but a species of masque, very dainty and thinly allegorical. Charles Lamb wrote of it that it is written 'in words which bees would talk with could they talk: the very air seems replete with humming and buzzing melodies while we read them.' A captious critic might rather irrelevantly suggest that neither Lamb nor Day knew anything about

[1] Those in *The Sun's Darling* are certainly Dekker's, and among his best.

[2] Mr. A. H. Bullen.

bees: but the praise, such as it is, seems deserved. A farcical comedy by Day, *Humour out of Breath* (1608), was produced in London in November, 1902. It is childishly farcical, but written with a light and graceful touch.

Thomas Middleton (1570-1627).

Thomas Middleton, who described himself as a 'gentleman,' and was educated for the law, probably at Gray's Inn, appears to have been one of the most popular dramatists of his time. His first play, *The Old Law*, written with Rowley and subsequently revised by Massinger, was produced in 1599, and in 1601-2 Middleton was writing for Henslowe. He produced comedies, tragedies, masques, pageants for the Lord Mayor, prose tracts, and a satire in verse. In 1620 he was appointed City Chronologer, a post which he held till his death. In 1624 the nine performances of his enormously successful political satire in dramatic form, *A Game at Chesse*, brought in £1,500, and got actors and author into trouble with the authorities. It is uncertain whether Middleton escaped actual imprisonment; but in any case the offence was not seriously dealt with. He was buried at Newington, 4th July, 1627.

Middleton's comedy probably owed its popularity to its vigorously farcical character and its coarseness. In *A Mad World my Masters*, *A Trick to catch the Old One* (published 1608), and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, he produced rough and ready comedy, full of animal spirits and coarse jesting, and lively with incident, but with little wit or humour. The play last mentioned, produced at the Swan on the Bankside in or about 1612, is as diverting, in the same kind of way, as Field's *Woman is a Weathercock*, but it is hardly suitable for parlour reading. *The Widow*, a romantic comedy written in conjunction with Fletcher, is distinguished by an unusually ludicrous plot. *A Fair Quarrel* is the best of Middleton's romances, and has

some real beauty, though disfigured by a gross and badly written underplot, for which Rowley is held responsible. Meritorious also is *The Spanish Gipsie* (1622-3), a picturesque medley, part romantic and part burlesque, interspersed with rhyme and song of considerable spirit, though little sense. But none of these plays have any claim to rank as literature of permanent value.[1] Middleton's real strength lay in dealing with tragic themes.

*The Changeling*, written about 1623, the finest of Middleton's plays, is in its strength and in its weakness a typical Elizabethan tragic drama. The idea is based upon a story

[1] The following is the approximately chronological list of Middleton's plays as given in the standard Works of Thomas Middleton (ed. A. H. Bullen), 8 vols., 1885-6:

| By Middleton alone. | | In Collaboration. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Blurt Master Constable* | 1602 | *The Old Law* (Massinger, Middleton, Rowley) | 1656 |
| *The Phoenix* | 1607 | *The Roaring Girle, or Moll Cut-Purse* (Middleton, Dekker) | 1611 |
| *Michaelmas Terme* | 1607 | *A Faire Quarrell* (Middleton, Rowley) | 1617 |
| *The Mayor of Quinborough* | 1661 | *The Widdow* (Jonson, Fletcher, Middleton) | 1652 |
| *A Tricke to Catch the Old One* | 1608 | *The Changeling* (Middleton, Rowley) | 1653 |
| *The Familie of Love* | 1608 | *The Spanish Gipsie* (Middleton, Rowley) | 1653 |
| *Your Five Gallants* | [1608] | *The World Tost at Tennis*, A Courtly Masque (Middleton, Rowley) | 1620 |
| *A Mad World, my Masters* | 1608 | | |
| *No Wit like a Woman's Help* | 1657 | | |
| *A Chast Mayd in Cheapeside* | 1630 | | |
| *Anything for a Quiet Life* | 1662 | | |
| *A Tragi-Coomodie, called The Witch* | 1778 | | |
| *Women Beware Women* | 1657 | | |
| *More Dissemblers besides Women* | 1657 | | |
| *A Game at Chesse* | 1625 | | |

The order is roughly that of composition (often very doubtful); the dates those of publication.

in Reynolds's *God's Revenge against Murther* (1621), but Middleton has altered the story in an essential respect. An impulsive, passionate, and ignorant girl, Beatrice, is placed between a suitor (Alonzo) favoured by her father and one (Alsemero) favoured by herself. She cannot refuse the man her father favours, but by murdering him she may possibly bring about her marriage with Alsemero. In her distress she turns to a third lover, one De Flores, whom she detests. At her incitement De Flores murders Alonzo, to free her as she supposes, but in fact to make it impossible for her to refuse him anything. She finds, or imagines herself, in the power of this man. Nevertheless she marries Alsemero and escapes the immediate discovery of her fall. In the fifth act comes the inevitable revelation.

Beatrice regards De Flores with contempt and aversion. He is fiercely in love with her, but she feels herself too far removed from his passion to fear it. She thinks him a fit instrument to do dirty work for her or any one. His readiness to murder Alonzo rouses in her no suspicion of his motive. She has no suspicion of what will follow: her anticipation is very different:

> 'I shall rid myself
> Of two inveterate loathings at one time.'

When (Act III. iv.), after the murder, he explains to her her position and his will, he has much ado to make her understand. She offers him money, and he has to put it brutally. When he only hints his will she declares that she cannot forgive his words 'with any modesty.' 'Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked!' she exclaims when she at last understands—so wicked as to have done murder for love rather than for money. This scene is one of the finest things in Elizabethan drama. The malignant joy of De Flores, his ravenous exultation, are splendidly

true. The phrases cut and stab. Very fine too is the contrast between Beatrice's desperate denials and ingenious, hopeless explanations at the end, and the defiant, triumphant confession of the man, who knows that Alsemero can be deceived no longer. Yet, fine as all this is, there is a serious flaw. The situation is finely conceived and rendered; but it is imperfectly constructed. There is no sufficient reason for Beatrice's yielding to De Flores. It is obvious that she could probably have safely defied him. He could not have proved his tale, and, in any case, defiance was her best chance. It is a good instance of the careless construction which mars some of the finest Elizabethan dramatic conceptions. The play, as a whole, is also seriously disfigured by a ridiculous comic underplot—by the ubiquitously offensive William Rowley.[1]

*Women beware Women*, the other play upon which Middleton's fame must rest, is admirably written from the first scene to the last, except for the insertion of some low comedy as gross and foolish as Elizabethan low comedy almost invariably is. The style has the same force, lucidity, and restraint as that of *The Changeling*. It is full of terse phrase of extreme vigour. The plot is far more cleverly managed than that of *The Changeling*, and strongly dramatic situations occur throughout the play. Unfortunately the plot is so extravagant and incredible, apart from its offensiveness, that the play cannot be re-

[1] William Rowley (1585?-1642?) was an actor who wrote a few plays single handed, and did a good deal of work in collaboration. A 'doggerel bard,' but a droll, Rowley, says Mr. Bullen, 'roared like a bull of Bashan, when he ought to have been dignified. But he had a genuine gift of humour.' He is to be distinguished from Samuel Rowley, author of a boisterous play called *When you see me you know me* (pub. 1605), dealing with Henry VIII. as a modern Haroun al Raschid, and introducing the jesters, Will Summers and Patch, and the famous musician, Christopher Tye.

garded as the work of a great artist. The situations, strong as they are, are invariably marred by their monstrous and incredible character. No strength of phrasing can redeem them from essential absurdity. When this powerful play was produced is not known: it was not published till 1657.[1]

Thomas Heywood (1575?-1650).

Thomas Heywood, a Lincolnshire man, was educated at Peterhouse, Cambridge, commenced writing for the stage in 1596, and died in 1650. The year of his birth is not known. He was an exceedingly industrious and prolific writer,[2] and in 1633 confessed to having had 'at least a main finger' in 220 dramas; nor does he seem to have written in collaboration as much as most of his contemporaries. Of these 220 dramas only twenty-four are extant.

Though Charles Lamb, judging him by extracts, called him a 'prose Shakespeare,' Heywood cannot be reckoned in any sense as a great dramatist. His dramas are various in kind, but as a whole are distinguished by simplicity and directness, by a strong tendency to a commonplace and undistinguished realism, by moral seriousness, by crudity of conception, and by a very marked deficiency in humour as well as in all the higher poetic qualities. His historical dramas (*Edward IV.* and *If you know not me*,

[1] One of Middleton's poorest plays, *The Witch*, appears to involve a vulgarization of the witches of *Macbeth*. The first lines of two songs in Middleton's play actually occur in *Macbeth*. The date of *The Witch* is not known. Middleton had no gift for the supernatural.

[2] He was also a biographical writer. In 1624 he published in folio *Nine Bookes of Various History concerninge Women*, and he was engaged on a biographical dictionary of poets, which was never published, and is now lost. He wrote a prose *Apologie for Actors* in 1612, defending the theatre from the attacks of Gosson and his Puritan successors. He himself was attached to the Lord Admiral's Company as an actor (1598).

*you know nobody*, 1605) are crude dramatizations of the chronicles, bald, prosaic, and without unity. His ideal romances, such as *A Challenge for Beauty*, are weak and extravagant. *Love's Mistress* (1636) is a curious allegorical masque, founded on the Cupid and Psyche story of Apuleius, and is perhaps the most poetic of Heywood's productions. *The Rape of Lucrece* (1608) is an astonishing compound of sentimentalism, moralizing, and buffoonery, and has some rollicking songs. *The Four Prentices of London* (published 1615, but written much earlier) is an extravaganza of extraordinary absurdity.[1] In certain semi-farcical comedies as *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (1638), Heywood displayed a positively childish quality of humour.

Heywood is at his best only in what may be called domestic romance: the romance, that is, of the real life he knew, as distinguished from the ideal romance which, at all events on the Elizabethan stage, had as a rule little relation to any life at all. Like Dekker he is a romantic realist, but he has not Dekker's imagination or Dekker's humour, and the lack of the latter quality is particularly conspicuous in his work. In *The English Traveller* (published 1633), *The Fair Maid of the West* (1617, published 1631), *Fortune by Land and Sea* (published 1655, but written much earlier in collaboration with W. Rowley), and *A Woman killed with Kindness*, that is, in all the best of his plays, he dealt, prosaically and sentimentally, with the romance of English middle-class life. In these plays there is a truth and simplicity of diction, a directness, a flesh-and-blood quality, and at times a pathos which, in spite of a thousand crudities and of wretchedly bad construction, makes them vital and sympathetic.

The best of them all, by universal consent, is *A Woman*

[1] It was satirized in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

*killed with Kindness*, produced in 1603, and printed in 1607. The plot of this play, if we leave aside an inharmonious and uninteresting underplot, is extremely simple. Mr. Frankford, a country gentleman of good fortune, married to a 'perfect bride,' takes into his household a broken gentleman named Wendoll. After the lapse of an uncertain time Wendoll takes advantage of the absolute trust of his benefactor to make love to his wife; and the wife, without any of the usual preliminaries, accepts him as a lover. Nicholas, an old servant, a faithful dog, who has always suspected the stranger, informs his master of his dishonour. Frankford obtains proof of his wife's guilt, and sends her to live alone, at ease, but cut off from her children, in a house at a few miles' distance. There she repents and pines and dies, and is wedded again to her husband 'with a kiss' upon her deathbed in a perfect reconciliation.

The uncommon merit of this play lies in the quiet beauty of the idea of this ending, and in the truth and pathos of the character of Frankford. It is clumsily and carelessly constructed, and the essential figure of the wife is a mere faint and vacillating outline. She sins and repents and dies alike without justification. Commendation of the play has been carried to somewhat absurd lengths; but it has, in spite of gross deficiencies, a quality of tenderness and truth, and even a real beauty.

### § 4. *Webster and Tourneur.*

John Webster (1580? 1625?).

John Webster has left hardly any record of his personal life. The son, it is supposed, of a London tailor, he was writing for Henslowe in 1602, and he wrote *The Devil's Law Case* about 1618; and assiduous research has discovered nothing more of the

least importance concerning him. In his early years as a dramatist he wrote in collaboration with Drayton, Middleton, Munday, Chettle, Dekker, Heywood, and the other writers exploited by Henslowe. Later on it would appear that he gave up collaboration, and he seems to have produced, in all, comparatively little. He has left us four plays entirely his own: *The White Devil*, produced 1607-8, and printed in 1612; *The Duchess of Malfi*, acted in 1616, and printed in 1623; *The Devil's Law Case*, printed in 1623; and *Appius and Virginia*, which was not printed till 1654. To these may be added two comedies, *Northward Ho* and *Westward Ho*, and a chronicle play, *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyat*, all three written in collaboration with Dekker.[1]

Of these plays, *Northward Ho* and *Westward Ho* are coarse and dull productions, and the *Sir Thomas Wyat* is a confused jumble of two plays without merit or any special interest. *The Devil's Law Case* has a curious and possibly rather painful interest for admirers of Webster: it is ugly and absurd, and, though there are fine things in it, it reveals the author at his worst. *Appius and Virginia* was written perhaps in emulation or imitation of Shakespeare. It shows little of Webster's characteristic imaginative power: it is as cold as *Sejanus*, and lacks Jonson's dignity. Webster's title to fame rests entirely upon the two tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

In the whole of Elizabethan drama there are no other

[1] *A Cure for a Cuckold*, published in 1661, was attributed by the publisher, Kirkman, to Webster and Rowley. There may be some of Webster's work in it, but it is a very poor play. Webster also made additions to Marston's *Malcontent*. Most of the plays in which he collaborated are lost. In 1624 was licensed *A late Murder by the Son upon the Mother*, by Webster and Ford. The loss of this is unfortunate.

plays outside Shakespeare which show such rare and intense imaginative power as these two. Their murky, lurid atmosphere, their sinister suggestiveness, the gloom of their imaginative cynicism, put them in a place apart. They are tragedies of unrestrained passion, working to utter wreck. Insensate pride, insensate lust and cruelty, destroy good and evil alike in a common ruin, and the curtain falls upon the massacre. There is no moral, or if one stands in the text, it is perfunctory and irrelevant.[1]

Webster shows little or none of that imagination which can realize the beauty or the terror or the mystery of the common. He must have extremities of wrong and violence, monstrous revenge and murder, cruelty and madness. And his imagination plays constantly with images of death and horror, in a manner that sometimes suggests disease. He loves the atmosphere of the charnel-house, and that is a fault: but he realizes it, and that is an achievement. We know no other play than these in which the atmosphere of horror and corruption generated by unrestrained passion is so realized, save Shelley's *Cenci*.

The peculiar genius of Webster probably reached its most intense expression in the fourth act of *The Duchess of Malfi*. The imprisoned Duchess, whose crime is to have loved beneath her, has been visited by her brother's ferocious irony and given, in the darkness of her lodging, a dead man's hand bearing the ring she had given to her lover; she has been shown, as she imagines, the corpses of her lover and her children; she has been mocked by the cries of madness, and she awaits death with longing. Then enters Bosola, the Duke's tool, commissioned to see her murdered, and there ensues a strange and fascinating dialogue in the highest degree characteristic:

[1] See the closing lines of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

'*Bos.* I am come to make thy tomb.

*Duch.* Ha! my tomb!

Thou speak'st as if I lay upon my death bed,
Gasping for breath: dost thou perceive me sick?

*Bos.* Yes, and the more dangerously since thy sickness is insensible.

*Duch.* Thou art not mad, sure: dost know me?

*Bos.* Yes.

*Duch.* Who am I?

*Bos.* Thou art a box of worm seed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? a little curded milk, fantastical puff-paste.[1] Our bodies are weaker than those paper-prisons boys use to keep flies in; more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-worms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.

*Duch.* Am not I thy duchess?

*Bos.* Thou art some great woman sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead (clad in grey hairs) twenty years sooner than on a merry milk-maid's. Thou sleepest worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.

*Duch.* I am Duchess of Malfi still.

*Bos.* That makes thy sleep so broken.

Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright
But, looked to near, have neither heat nor light.

*Duch.* Thou art very plain.

*Bos.* My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living;
I am a tomb-maker.'

With such fantastic and sinister irony Bosola condoles with the woman he is about to kill. Then come the murderers; and Duke Ferdinand, standing by the corpse, pos-

[1] Victor Hugo's 'argile idéale.'

sessed already by that horror of his own action which drives him to madness, utters the famous line:

'Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young,'

and turns savagely on the instrument of his revenge.

Yet even this really wonderful act of *The Duchess of Malfi* is to some extent marred by certain faults to which Webster was extremely prone: a straining after the horrible, which leads him to the grotesque, and a love of sententious aphorism which results in the solemn enunciation of commonplaces in passages of extreme tragic horror. The talk of the madmen in this act is perilously near the line which separates the sublime from the ridiculous; but the line is overstepped by the waxen figures of Antonio and the children. And in the passage just quoted the couplet, 'Glories, like glow-worms,' is a false note weakening the concentration of the dialogue.[1]

Webster has little sense of character. When he elaborates, as in Bosola, he becomes unintelligible: ordinarily he is content to express mood and passion. Most of his personages have, properly speaking, no character: there is

[1] Another instance occurs in this same act: in Ferdinand's feeble remark, 'Intemperate agues make physicians cruel' (Sc. i.). But the worst case of all occurs in the last scene of *The White Devil*. The dying Vittoria speaks the fine lines:

> 'My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
> Is driven I know not whither.'

It would have added a beauty to the scene had these been her last words. But her last words are:

> 'O happy they that never saw the court,
> Nor ever knew great men but by report'—

a remark almost as irrelevant as it is trivial. The diction of *Malfi* owes much to Sidney's *Arcadia* (see *Notes and Queries*, 1904).

nothing static about them. They are creatures of the moment, and we can hardly imagine them at all apart from the situations in which they are presented.

That Webster was a disciple, and even a conscious imitator, of Shakespeare is perfectly clear. The madness of Cornelia in *The White Devil*, fine and in some ways original as it is, is greatly and obviously indebted, both in design and in detail, to the madness of Ophelia. The verse of Webster is structurally, though not in dignity or assonance, the later verse of Shakespeare, and shows the same tendency to run into prose. But the resemblance to Shakespeare is superficial, and at least partially voluntary. The utter lack of any kindly light of humour in Webster, the love of horror for its own sake, the lack of character-sense, the narrow and cruel intensity of the minor dramatist mark him as a mind of wholly different type.

Both Webster's great tragedies show a want of constructive skill unusual even among Elizabethan playwrights, *The White Devil* in particular being absolutely chaotic. It may be noted also that they present a rather curious parallelism in construction. Each play has a duke and a cardinal, whose parts respectively correspond; Bosola, an elaborated and confused Flamineo, stands in the same relation to the plot of the *Duchess* as Flamineo to the plot of *The White Devil*, and each play has a woman as central figure. And different as the two women are, they are the only personages in the plays for whom there is any attempt to create sympathy. The number of subjects that Webster's aberrant genius could effectively treat in drama was probably extremely limited.[1]

[1] The plot of *The Duchess of Malfi* was suggested by an incident of Neapolitan history, narrated by Bandello (Novel 19), translated by Belleforest, and thence introduced into Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. Lope de Vega wrote a play on the same incident. The

Cyril Tourneur (1575?-1626).

Of the life of Cyril Tourneur,[1] a literary relative of Webster, but far more closely related to Marston, very little indeed is known. Recent research has, however, somewhat increased our knowledge. He was born about 1575, his earliest verse was published in 1600, and in 1613 he seems to have undertaken to write for Henslowe a portion of a play never published. In that same year he obtained employment in the King's service in the Netherlands, where he seems to have spent many later years, and to have earned a pension from the Government of the United Provinces. In 1625 he accompanied the ill-starred expedition to Cadiz as 'secretary to the lord marshall,' dying in Ireland on his return in February, 1626.

Tourneur was the author of some excessively affected and insincere poems, was a deliberate imitator of and borrower from Shakespeare, and was yet a dramatic writer of the most intense individuality. The most important of his poems, *The Transformed Metamorphosis* (published 1600), is an allegorical satire which reads like a parody of the most foolish affectations of Hall and Marston.[2] Written in a silly jargon of hideous Latin and Greek compounds, and crammed with mythological allusions, and with terms borrowed from the most obscure of contemporary sciences—alchemy, astrology, and theology—it might be supposed to have been composed on the principle that to be intelligible is to be found out. Somewhat less foolish than this absurd verbiage are the elegies on Prince Henry and Sir Francis Vere; but it remains astonishing

plot of *The White Devil* is also founded on an historical incident, of which no contemporary account is known except in Italian.

[1] Or Turnour or Turner. See *Dict. Nat. Biog.*

[2] Mr. Churton Collins (*Plays and Poems of Tourneur*, 2 vols., 1878) points out a resemblance to Middleton's *Microcynicon*, 'Six Snarling Satires' of 1599.

that the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* should have written such cold and meretricious verses.

Of his two extant[1] plays, *The Revenger's Tragedy* was printed in 1607, *The Atheist's Tragedy* in 1611. There is not, however, the least doubt that the latter is the earlier production. It is a crude, boyish piece of work, imitative, badly constructed, with an absurd plot and worthless characterization, but written in easy and supple verse, which occasionally becomes rich and graceful. It is remarkable chiefly as the production of an obviously youthful disciple of Shakespeare, whose diction is imitated throughout, and from whom expressions, passages, and situations are borrowed or paraphrased.[2]

Tourneur's title to literary distinction rests in fact upon *The Revenger's Tragedy*. This play is extraordinary alike in its qualities and in its defects. Elizabethan lack of humour, Elizabethan love of violence, Elizabethan carelessness of probability or plausibility of detail, are nowhere better illustrated. Yet in spite of its manifest faults it is a work of genius, though of probably morbid and certainly eccentric genius. The scene is laid in a ducal palace, in an atmosphere foul with lust and jealousy, lurid with treachery and hate. Murder and rape are commonplaces in this unearthly court. In the midst of it is set the figure of Vendice, the Revenger. The play is a tragedy of hatred: the hate of the duke's sons for each other, and for their father, and of Vendice for them all. Hating and hateful they

[1] He wrote at least one more play, *The Nobleman*. This was never printed, and a manuscript copy was destroyed by the immortal servant of Warburton. It was described in the Stationers' books as a tragi-comedy. The plays burned or 'put under pye bottoms' by Betsy Baker, servant to John Warburton, the herald, about 1748, were mainly by Massinger (see *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1815, ii. 217; H. Coleridge's 'Introduction' to Massinger; and Lansdowne MS. 807, Brit. Mus.).

[2] See Act III. iv. and Act IV. iii.

destroy each other. But Vendice is no mere avenger of a private wrong. For him the ducal family epitomizes humanity. His readiness to attempt the corruption of his mother and sister seems intended to indicate the extent of his mental deformity.[1] He is, moreover, an artist in hatred. He is not content with murdering the duke cruelly, and triumphing in his agony. His justice must be poetic: he must poison the duke with the skull of the sister whom the duke's lust had murdered. His half insane figure dominates the play with a savage and trenchant force peculiar to Tourneur, peculiar, indeed, to this single drama.[2] The rest of the characters are mere indications or futilities. Most of them serve only to thicken the foul atmosphere. The two women, just as in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, are nullities. Tourneur, it seems, knew nothing worth knowing about women.

The writing throughout the play constantly reminds us of Shakespeare's later diction. The verse is very strong and very supple. The diction is extraordinarily direct and forcible, and free from all needless ornament; the expression is concentrated, and sometimes to the point of obscurity. Though entirely lacking the higher imaginative beauty, the verse has at times a fierce, trenchant strength which admirably fits the theme.

To compare Tourneur's tragedy with the great Shakespearean tragedy would be mere waste, and he suffers severely even by comparison with Webster. There is in Tourneur nothing of that grace with which Webster can invest his gloom, nothing of that mystery which Webster gave to his crime and horror. The strength of *The Revenger's Tragedy* lies in its savage intensity, its lurid cynicism,

[1] Otherwise this whole episode is as unintelligible and irrelevant as the repentance of the mother is certainly absurd.

[2] Vendice, the avenger, may have been suggested by Hamlet, but there is no likeness between the two except in situation.

and its blurred picturesqueness. But it is too harsh and inhuman for either pity or terror. At least in its terror there is no mystery, and therefore none of the highest beauty.

## § 5. *Marston. Chapman.*

John Marston (1575-6–1634).

John Marston, satirist and dramatist, was educated at Brasenose College, Oxford; published his first verses in 1598; and apparently did all his dramatic work between 1599 and 1607, about which year he seems to have abandoned literature. He took orders, and in 1616 was presented to the living of Christchurch in Hampshire. Such recorded incidents of his life as have any significance are concerned with his quarrels with Ben Jonson. He appears to have libelled Jonson on the stage,[1] and figures as Crispinus in *The Poetaster* (1601). Nevertheless he dedicated *The Malcontent* to Jonson (1604), and wrote complimentary verses for his *Sejanus*, which was printed in 1605. Later on Jonson spoke bitterly of him, and told Drummond that on one occasion he 'beat him and took his pistol from him.'

Marston's dramatic work is of small value. Such value as it has lies chiefly in a certain fierce and bitter trenchancy of expression which reminds us of Tourneur. He is often acute and sometimes witty, and his vigour is unbounded. He has no power of characterization, no sense of beauty in human life, and is therefore powerless to create sympathy. In tragedy he was very ambitious and equally unsuccessful. His *History of Antonio and Mellida* (two parts, 1602) is a large canvas wretchedly arranged and painted in the coarsest and ugliest colours, a few powerful lines standing out in a

[1] Whether Marston is the author of *Histriomastix*, a play acted in or before 1599, in which Jonson seems to be caricatured as Crysoganus, is uncertain.

mass of rant. His *Sophonisba* (1606) is revolting alike in subject and treatment, and very badly written. Equally revolting, but containing graceful passages quite unlike the writing of Marston, is *The Insatiate Countess* (1613). A couple of lines, far finer than any others to be found in all the verse attributed to Marston, occur in this play:

> 'Night, like a masque, is entered heaven's great hall
> With thousand torches ushering the way.'

These lines are, however, also found in the *Mirrha* (1607) of William Barksted, who was probably the author of all the sweeter parts of *The Insatiate Countess*.[1] Marston shows far better in comedy than in his attempts to write poetic tragedies. His trenchant wit and acuteness, and a certain power of pithy phrasing, give a real value to his comedies. The best are *The Malcontent* (1604) and *The Dutch Courtezan* (1605). The former is perhaps his most typical play, and it is almost an abuse of language to call so grim and cynical a piece a comedy. The latter is the liveliest and most amusing of his plays, but is by no means free from that harshness and dryness which is Marston's constant characteristic. *Eastward Ho* (1605) was the joint production of Marston, Chapman, and Jonson, though the part of the last named in it seems to have been very small. Passages in this play reflecting on the Scots gave offence in the highest quarters, and the authors were sent for a time to prison. The tone of this play is far more genial than that of any other work of Marston's, but it doubtless did not derive this quality from him.[2]

[1] William Barksted was an actor, and the author of two poems entitled *Mirrha, the Mother of Adonis* (1607), in which a halting compliment is paid to Shakespeare, and *Hiren* (1611), which have been edited by Dr. Grosart. It is possible that Marston left his *Insatiate Countess* unfinished, and that Barksted completed it.

[2] Marston's other comedies are *The Fawne* (1606) and *What you*

George Chapman (1559-1634).

George Chapman was born before the production of *Gorboduc*, and died so late that he may have read Milton's 'epitaph' on Shakespeare. There are indications that he studied both at Oxford and Cambridge, but he took a degree at neither. Certainly he was the most learned of all the Elizabethan dramatists save Jonson. He is supposed to have travelled on the Continent, and in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* (published 1654), he displays a knowledge of Germany and German manners; but there is some reason for thinking that this early play was really by George Peele. He began writing for the stage about 1596, and his first extant play, an execrable comedy called *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, was published in 1598, having been acted two years earlier. The works on which his fame as a dramatist rests, however, date considerably later. *All Fools* was written in 1599 and published in 1605, *Bussy d'Ambois* in 1607, *The Conspiracy* and *The Tragedy of Byron* in 1608, and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* in 1613. His latest plays, *The Ball, a Comedy*, and *Philip Chabot, Admiral of France* (both published in 1639), were written in collaboration with Shirley.

As a dramatist[1] Chapman displayed great qualities, but not dramatic qualities. It would hardly be too much to say that for drama he had no talent whatever. He has not the most elementary notion of characterization: his characters

*will* (1607), while he was also perhaps the author of *Histriomastix* (see p. 191 n.) and *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600?, printed 1616); sarcastic allusions to Ben Jonson *passim*. His earliest literary work was a licentious poem in the metre of *Venus and Adonis* called *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598). This, by order of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was deservedly burned. Marston's *Works* were edited in 3 vols. by Mr. Bullen in 1887.

[1] As translator and poet Chapman is dealt with in Book I., pp. 81-82. But all his best poetry is in his dramas.

are mere mouthpieces of his own. His plots, almost without exception, are constructed with extraordinary clumsiness and lack of dramatic sense. His use of the supernatural is grotesquely absurd. He is tediously long-winded; his puppets do not talk; they make speeches. The call for rapidity of movement never reaches his mind: the need of fitting his rhetoric to the mood of the moment never occurs to him. At the crisis in *The Tragedy of Byron* (IV. i.), King Henry, having at last reluctantly made up his mind to order the arrest of the Duke, whom he loves and admires, is made to soliloquize thus, aside, but in the Duke's presence:

> 'It is resolved; a work shall now be done
> Which, while learned Atlas shall with stars be crowned,
> While th' ocean walks in storms his wavy round,
> While moons at full repair their broken rings,
> While Lucifer foreshows Aurora's springs
> And Arates sticks above the earth unmoved,
> Shall make my realm be blest and me beloved.'

Of the only one of his plays which can be said to be well constructed, the comedy of *All Fools*, the plot is adopted from the *Heautontimorumenos* of Terence. This is by far the best of Chapman's comedies. It is not witty, but its incident is amusing and its general plan good. Chapman had a very small wit and was almost innocent of humour. Most of his comedies are as poorly written as they are badly constructed.[1] They are deliberately cynical in tone and full, as Russell Lowell excellently put it, of a 'stiff and wilful coarseness.'

Chapman's best work is all in the tragedies which he founded on incidents of contemporary French life. Of

[1] *Monsieur d'Olive* (1606) opens well and goes completely to pieces. *The Widow's Tears* (1612) is characteristic. His other plays were *An Humorous Days Mirth* (1599), *Gentleman Usher* (1606), and *May-day* (1611).

these, the *Bussy d'Ambois* and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* are quite separate and only distantly connected plays; while *The Conspiracy* and *The Tragedy of Byron* form a continuous play in ten acts. The last is a strictly historical drama and in it Chapman closely followed Pierre Matthieu.[1] Throughout the series he showed a remarkable superiority to the popular view in matters of history, treating sympathetically the Duke of Guise and Henri III. of France, and eulogizing Philip II. of Spain in a passage in *The Tragedy of Byron*.

In his dedication to the *Revenge* Chapman spoke of 'material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs and limits of an authentical tragedy.' From this point of view his tragedies must be judged to be tolerably authentical.[2] Dryden, however, found in them 'a dwarfish thought, dressed up in gigantic words,' and 'the sense of one line prodigiously expanded into ten.' An illustration of what Dryden meant by this last phrase has been given in the passage already quoted. It is not that Chapman fails to express his thought clearly and concisely: on the contrary, his phrasing is more consistently concentrated, and even epigrammatic, than that of any other Elizabethan dramatist. But he develops his thought with such fullness and with so much needless illustration as to give an intolerable impression of verbosity. 'Dwarfish thought'

[1] Passages in it were objected to by the French ambassador, and were in consequence suppressed. This probably explains why in the *Tragedy* the whole of the second act is wanting. The Duc de Biron was executed in 1602. Another loosely constructed historical tragedy, by no means on the same level with *The Conspiracy*, is *Caesar and Pompey*, printed in 1631.

[2] Though the nature of the excitation caused by the overbearing amours of Bussy and the torture of his paramour on the stage is dubious.

is exaggerated; but it is true that Chapman labours the entirely commonplace and is habitually unduly emphatic.

But, when all has been said, it must be admitted that there are in these strange dramas of Chapman many passages of wonderful power and almost unique poetic quality. In such passages 'the proud, full sail of his great verse' has an amplitude and a sweep hardly equalled elsewhere; there are phrases of the highest imaginative quality, beautiful and exquisitely just images, and a reach of thought beyond the capacity of almost any other Elizabethan dramatist. Such phrases as 'Man is a torch borne in the wind' (*Bussy*, I. i.) account for much of the enthusiastic admiration with which Chapman has been and is regarded. Or take this passage from the speech of Byron about to die:

> 'And so farewell for ever. Never more
> Shall any hope of my revival see me.
> Such is the endless exile of dead men:
> Summer succeeds the spring, autumn the summer;
> The frosts of winter the fall'n leaves of autumn:
> All these and all fruits in them yearly fade
> And every year return: but cursed man
> Shall never more renew his vanished face.'

Or this, which is still finer and more characteristic:

> 'Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
> Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind,
> Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship run on her side so low
> That she drinks water and her keel ploughs air.
> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is; there 's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law.'

Just because Chapman is so undramatic and so essentially an imaginative moralizer on life, he reads best in extracts.

And amid much verbosity, over-emphasis, and emphatic commonplace he is so frequently and so magnificently inspired, that we cannot help regarding him as one of the greatest poets of the Elizabethan drama.

### § 6. *Ben Jonson.*

Ben Jonson (1573-1637).

Of all the Elizabethan dramatists Ben Jonson alone, besides Shakespeare, seriously aroused the interest and admiration of the eighteenth century.[1] And in spite of the glorification of his contemporaries by the nineteenth century, popular tradition still rightly places him next to Shakespeare among the dramatists of his age.

According to Jonson himself his grandfather was a 'gentleman' who came from Annandale to Carlisle, and held some position about the Court of Henry VIII. The poet's father got into trouble, presumably on account of his religion, in the reign of Mary, lost his estate, became a 'minister,' and died a month before the birth 'in the city of Westminster' of his great son, leaving his widow in something like destitution. The widow married, about 1575, a master-bricklayer, who resided near Charing Cross. Ben, still according to his own account, was 'poorly brought up.' He was, however, schooled at Westminster at the expense of the great scholar William Camden, then second master there.[2] Later he seems to have worked at bricklaying, but not for long. While still a boy he escaped to the Nether-

[1] The first critical edition of his works was Whalley's, 7 vols., 1756; this was followed by William Gifford's, 1816, dedicated to Canning, and revised by Cunningham, 1875. The Clarendon Press is committing a new edition to the care of Dr. Herford.

[2] It is just possible that but for Camden we should not have had *Volpone*. Jonson dedicated to Camden his first great play, *Every Man in his Humour*.

lands to join the English troops there against the Spaniards.[1] But he was probably still under twenty when he returned to London (1592?). Whether he now had again to carry the hod is uncertain, but in any case he married a woman whom he describes as 'a shrew yet honest,' and must have been very poor. All this is intelligible enough: what remains unexplained is how he was able, in the circumstances, to lay the foundations of the extensive and thorough classical learning that he possessed later.

He seems to have become connected with the stage both as actor and playwright as early as 1595. In 1597 he was working for Henslowe, and in 1598-9, with Dekker and Chettle, produced a tragedy, *Robert the Second*.[2] In 1598 he killed one Gabriel Spencer, a fellow-actor, in a duel, and pleaded guilty to a charge of felony. By benefit of clergy he escaped with a short term of imprisonment, and while in prison he accepted the Roman Catholic faith 'on trust,' as he told Drummond, from a priest who was probably a fellow-prisoner.[3] Though neither Jonson himself nor his friends regarded this now obscure affair as at all discreditable, it seems to have produced a temporary breach with Henslowe; for Jonson's first great play, *Every Man in his Humour*, was brought out in November 1598, not by Henslowe but by the Lord Chamberlain's company at the Curtain, which was Shakespeare's.[4]

[1] He boasted afterwards that on one occasion he challenged, fought, and killed one of the enemy in single fight between the two armies.

[2] It is possible that other early tragedies of his are lost. Meres, in 1598, mentions him as one of 'the best for tragedy'; but this may easily be a mistake. There seems little doubt that *Every Man in his Humour* was immediately followed by *The Case is Altered*. See p. 208.

[3] Twelve years later he left the Roman Catholics and conformed to the Anglican Church.

[4] Probably, though the point is controverted. The Globe was not finished before 1599. A tradition, recorded by Rowe, asserts that

With this play Jonson's reputation as a playwright of the first order was established. From 1599 to 1602 he is again writing for Henslowe, chiefly in collaboration, but he included none of this hack-work in the edition of his works published in 1616. In these same years, however, he produced *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *The Poetaster*. These are the years of his only too famous quarrels with Marston and Dekker, both of whom he caricatured in the two last mentioned comedies.[1] Jonson's success and his arrogance, and his critical and contemptuous attitude towards other men's work, of course made him enemies; and he seems to have been very sensitive to the 'ignorant' opinion which on all occasions he was so emphatic in announcing that he despised. *The Poetaster* was written in a hurry, to forestall the attack which Dekker and Marston were preparing in *Satiromastix*. It is noteworthy, however, that Jonson does not confine himself to caricature and abuse of his enemies: alike in the *Revels* and *The Poetaster* he passes beyond them to satirize the drama of the time generally, and makes them a pretext for the assertion of some of his own views as to what drama should and should not be.

In 1603 was produced Jonson's earliest extant tragedy, *Sejanus*, and with the accession of James I. he entered upon his period of glory. He was employed in that year to write an *Entertainment* for the King's reception at Althorp on his journey to London. In 1605, the year of *Volpone*, he produced the first of his series of Court masques, and, but for a short episode,[2] he remained high

Jonson's offer of his comedy to the 'Lord Chamberlain's servants' would have been refused had not Shakespeare read and recommended it.

[1] Marston appears as Hedon in *Cynthia's Revels*, and as Crispinus in *The Poetaster*; Dekker is Demetrius in *The Poetaster*, and is, perhaps, Anaides in the *Revels*.

[2] In 1605, Chapman and Marston having been sent to prison for

in favour at Court to the end of the reign. In 1616 he received, under letters patent, a grant of the title Poet Laureate and a pension of a hundred marks.[1]

In 1628 he succeeded Middleton as Chronologer to the City. He became familiar with a number of highly placed people: with the Earl of Pembroke, the Countess of Rutland, with Donne's friend the Countess of Bedford, and with Lord D'Aubigny. It was rumoured that the King intended to confer on him a knighthood. All his very best work was done in the years between the accession of James and the appearance of *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614. In 1616 he published a folio edition of his works.

In 1618 he set out on his famous walking tour to Scotland, remaining absent from London nearly a year, and spending some weeks as the guest of Drummond of Hawthornden. Drummond's record of his conversation is of real value and interest. It throws a vivid light on the rough, proud, self-assertive, dogmatic, and frankly contemptuous great man. That Drummond's impression should have been unfavourable, that his feminine fastidiousness should have been offended, is not at all to be wondered at, and is not in the least to Jonson's discredit. If we read between his lines the impression we shall get will be by no means unpleasant: 'A great lover and praiser of himself: a contemner and scorner of others' Jonson certainly was.[2]

remarks about the Scots in *Eastward Ho*, Jonson, as a co-author, characteristically insisted on sharing their fate. 'The report was they should have had their ears cut and noses.' Probably there was never any chance of that happening, and they were soon released.

[1] This grant was renewed in 1630, when the pension was increased to £100, and 'one terse of Canary Spanish wine yearly.' The salary was the same as that of the King's physician.

[2] Drummond's remark about Jonson's 'jealousy' was a rather stupid misapprehension, and his saying that drink was 'one of

Jonson's last great play, *The Staple of News*, appeared in Feb. 1625-6, and with the accession of Charles I. his favour at Court and in the city began to decline. The new King appears not to have rated him very highly, and latterly his favour at Court was undermined through his quarrel with Inigo Jones. His latest plays show signs of declining powers.[1] Yet his reputation remained great to the end. In his last years he was tho acknowledged chief

the elements in which he liveth' sounds malicious. To Drummond Jonson's virility was, no doubt, coarse; and Jonson did not care for Drummond's verses.

[1] *The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633). Yet that beautiful fragment, *The Sad Shepherd*, first published in 1641, certainly shows no falling off, and might belong, as it possibly does belong, to the period of his best masques. The following table shows the plays at a glance, with the dates of *publication*:

| By Jonson alone. | |
|---|---|
| *Every Man in his Humor* | 1601 |
| *The Case is Altered* | 1609 |
| *Every Man out of his Humor* | 1600 |
| *Cynthia's Revels* | 1601 |
| *The Poetaster* | 1602 |
| *Sejanus his Fall* | 1605 |
| *Volpone or the Fox* | 1607 |
| *Epicoene or the Silent Woman* | 1609 (?) |
| *The Alchemist* | 1612 |
| *Catiline his Conspiracy* | 1611 |
| *Bartholomew Fayre* | 1631 |
| *The Divell is an Asse* | 1631 |
| *The Staple of Newes* | 1631 |
| *The New Inn* | 1631 |
| *The Magnetick Lady* | 1641 |
| *A Tale of a Tub* | 1641 |
| *The Sad Shepherd* | 1641 |
| *Mortimer his Fall* | 1641 |

| In Collaboration. | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Eastward Ho* | Jonson, Chapman, Marston | 1605 |
| *The Widdow* | Jonson, Fletcher, Middleton | 1652 |
| *The Bloody Brother* | Fletcher, Jonson (?) | 1639 |

| No longer Extant. | |
|---|---|
| *A Hot Anger soon Cool'd* | Jonson, Porter, Chettle |
| *Page of Plymouth* | Jonson, Dekker |
| *Robert II. King of Scots' Tragedy* | Jonson, Dekker, Chettle 'and other gentellmen' |
| *Richard Crookback.* | |

of English letters, and reigned at the Devil Tavern over a court of disciples and admirers, among whom were Herrick and Randolph and Falkland. He died on August 6th, 1637, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.[1] The folio edition of his works, begun in 1616, was completed by instalments, 1631-41.

At the age of twenty-five Jonson came before the public with *Every Man in his Humour*, not merely as an innovator, but as a censor of other men's work, and a teacher by precept as well as example of what drama ought to be. No sooner is his period of apprenticeship over than he assumes the air of a dictator, a laureate, a censor of the stage. In the prologue to this his first serious work, he haughtily prays his audience to

> 'Be pleased to see
> One such to-day, as other plays should be.'[2]

This attitude he maintains to the end with swaggering arrogance and absolute assurance, 'as one who knows the strength of his own Muse.'[3] In the induction to *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) he tells his audience that if the play fail there can only be one explanation: 'Art hath an enemy called Ignorance.' 'By . . . 'tis good, and if you like 't you may!' ends the epilogue to *Cynthia's Revels*. Nothing could exceed the studied insolence of the address to the 'reader in ordinary,' which he prefixed to *Catiline*; and again in the prologue to *The Staple of News*, and again in that to *The New Inn*, he tells his auditors that it is their fault if they do not like his play.

[1] A crowd of poets and poetasters hurried to decorate his tomb with their verses. Among them were Ford, Waller, Lord Falkland, Cartwright, and Cleveland. Their productions were published in 1638 under the title *Jonsonus Virbius*.

[2] This prologue was not, however, printed till 1616.

[3] Prelude to *The Poetaster*.

Happily he did not confine himself in his prologues and prefaces to praising his own work and expressing his contempt of his audiences. To some extent, at least, he gives reasons for the faith that was in him. That to Jonson's mind the contemporary drama was for the most part worthless there can be no doubt. He could not but admire Shakespeare; he admired Beaumont and Fletcher with much reservation; and Chapman, steeped in classicism, was a dramatist somewhat after his own heart. For the rest he probably had, as he certainly had for the 'rogues' or 'base fellows,' Dekker, Day, Marston, and Middleton, a hearty contempt. The work of these dramatists seemed to him a mass of absurdities, lacking form, consistency, unity or actuality, full of rodomontade, without restraint, without moral import, pretentious and empty. He would have no fine writing for the sake of it, no heroics out of place, no buffoonery, no playing to the gallery in order to excite the 'foamy praise that drops from common jaws.'[1]

His own theory of the drama was in violent antagonism to the practice of his contemporaries. It was generated by his strong common sense, by his sense of form, by his love of the actual, by his rather captious contempt for the excesses and absurdities of such writers as Marston, and by his reverence for classical models. He himself would, of course, have said that it was generated by reason.

The attempt to represent on the stage more than could with plausibility be presented seemed to him an outrage on common sense. The flight over land and sea, the shifting of the scene from Sicily to Bohemia, the lapse of years between acts seemed to him as preposterous as the attempt to represent the wars of York and Lancaster with 'three rusty swords.' Conversely the observance of the

[1] Prologue to *Cynthia's Revels.*

unities seemed reasonable. He boasts of it in his own practice:

> 'The laws of time, place, persons he observeth,
> From no needful rule he swerveth.'[1]

But he was no pedant: his common sense was far too strong. In the induction to *Every Man out of his Humour* he deprecates an unintelligent subservience to antiquity. Though the action of most of his plays passes within twenty-four hours and he avoids all violent changes of scene, he makes no attempt to adhere strictly to unity of place, perceiving that such adherence causes greater absurdities than it avoids. But what he does aim at, and what in all his greatest plays, in *Every Man in his Humour*, in *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman*, and *Bartholomew Fair*, he achieves, is not the formal unities, but essential unity, unity of effect, picturesque, moral, and psychological. An admirable instance of his artistic self-restraint is afforded by the fact that he struck out the fine speech in praise of true poetry in *Every Man in his Humour*, because its lyrical quality conflicted with the tone of the play as a whole. Jonson conceived comedy as a picture of manners, and it must be remembered that in 1598 there existed hardly an adumbration of the comedy of manners in English. Earlier attempts at comedy had for the most part been extremely crude and elementary. Clownish foolery, verbal wit such as Lyly's—a sort of elaboration of the principle of the pun—and the kind of fun that depends on mistaken identity, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, had formed the staple of comedy so far. Shakespeare, indeed, had in *Love's Labour's Lost* approached the comedy of popular affectations, but he had dealt with the subject fantastically. In *Henry IV.* he had introduced comedy of which the realism and the

[1] Prologue to *Volpone*.

humour alike were beyond anything that Jonson could do; but he had introduced it only episodically. *Every Man in his Humour* was a new thing in English drama.

But to say that Jonson conceived of comedy as a picture of manners, and that he aimed at the presentation of social types, is to say little. Judging not by his expressed theory so much as by his practice, we are bound to say that he conceived of comedy as essentially satiric and didactic. To him the end of comedy is ridicule of folly and every form of pretension, affectation, and cant, and the exhibition of the comic hideousness of lust, avarice, and dishonesty. Utterly intolerant of every kind of folly and cant, his comedy is the whip with which he scourged what he hated and despised. Herein is at once strength and weakness. He has no sympathy for his scoundrels and fools. He exhibits their follies and their vices pitilessly, minutely, aspect after aspect, and bids us not so much laugh as scorn and loathe. Indeed, it is almost too serious for laughter. We can laugh somewhat at Bobadill and Kitely, because in *Every Man in his Humour* there is a certain geniality of manner.[1] But this disappears in the later comedy: the scourging is too terrific, the exposure too brutal for laughter. Who can laugh at Corvino? Even the roaring humours of *Bartholomew Fair* are grim in the memory. Throughout his comedies Jonson stands apart, an unsympathetic showman, an Asper,[2] contemptuous and wrathful. His ridicule trembles always on the verge of

[1] Morose, too, in *The Silent Woman* is, of course, laughable; but Morose is the most purely farcical of all Jonson's figures.

[2] The 'presenter' of *Every Man out of his Humour*. In *Cynthia's Revels* Jonson is Crites; in *The Poetaster* he is Horace. It is to be observed that he hates folly, cant, and affectation more than downright scoundrelism. If in his greatest plays he shows any sympathy it is with the transcendent and intellectualized wickedness of Volpone and the triumphant dexterity of Face.

denunciation. We cannot laugh heartily at what we despise, and Jonson himself is not amused, or only grimly. *Volpone* is tragedy rather than comedy, and *Bartholomew Fair* a farce that Juvenal might have written.

Nor can we laugh very heartily at types and personifications. There is another reason besides the unsympathetic mode of their presentation why Jonson's figures rouse in us none of that sympathy which is the soul of pleasant laughter. They are not quite human. It is not true to say that they are merely 'humours,' merely personifications of a vice, an affectation, a species of folly, a master-passion. Jonson cleverly differentiates those of his figures which resemble each other most closely in type. Bobadill differs from Tucca, and Mosca from Face. But it would hardly be exaggeration to say that Jonson takes a master-passion, a 'humour,' and constructs a man by tricking it out with an elaborate and complex outfit of realistic detail, phrase, manner, habit, and surroundings. The result is something that will pass very well for a human figure if not looked at too closely. But if looked at closely, it is seen to be psychologically defective. The thing is far too simple; it is all of a piece; it has only one or two motives; in other words, it is not human. It was not in Jonson to body forth such figures as step out of the pages of Shakespeare, and live with us as familiar acquaintance.

But, after all, we have no right to demand laughter of Jonson, still less a creative power given to Shakespeare alone among dramatists. It must be remembered that Jonson the satirist, the censor, did not require for his purposes the creation of complete human beings. Where the main end is satire of social types, complete human figures, demanding sympathy and untypical in some proportion to their individuality, are out of place. And by

comparison with those of any other Elizabethan dramatist than Shakespeare, how rich and vivid are his portraits! The illusion is all but perfect: the reality of externals is as complete as the development of the central idea is masterly. How brilliantly are his figures diversified, illustrated, and set off against each other; with what a wealth of notions and imagery, with what masculine wit and energy does he exhibit them! Jonson is by far the most intellectual of Elizabethan dramatists save Shakespeare. Every scene of his great comedies has a concentrated force, a drastic wit, an irony, a sublime common sense, a grip of detail, a vivid intensity, hardly to be paralleled. The conception and the construction of *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair* are alike triumphs of imagination and grasp. In exactness of observation Jonson matches Shakespeare, and in constructive power he stands first of all. At his highest points, in Volpone and in Sir Epicure Mammon, his imagination has created transcendent and unique figures, in which the comic and the horrible meet and are one.[1]

A few points concerning his most important comedies may be noted.

*Every Man in his Humour* (first given in 1598), extraordinarily mature for the age at which it was written, and

[1] There seems little truth in the assertion that Jonson's plays are cramped or made wearisome by his recondite learning. If he sometimes goes out of his way to display it, on the whole (except, perhaps, in the Roman plays) he carries it lightly and uses it with judgement. He rarely strikes one as pedantic. The list of alchemical terms in Act II. i. of *The Alchemist* could hardly be shortened without loss, nor could Subtle's speech in the same scene, beginning 'It is, of the one part.' Perhaps the two together are rather too much. But on the whole Milton's 'learned sock' is not much more appropriate than the 'warble' and the 'wood-notes' of the following lines,

rich in thought, humour, and observation, is yet youthful. Its comparative geniality has been mentioned. The attitude of Jonson here is rather that of Justice Clement than of Asper; and of all his creations Bobadill is perhaps the most Shakespearean. Its construction, though far superior to that of almost all Elizabethan plays, is defective. Nothing is made of the younger Knowell's poetic affectation, and the disguises of Brainworm are extremely thin. This is the most Plautian of all Jonson's comedies. Kitely, Brainworm, and Bobadill all have their prototypes in Latin; but Jonson has so completely anglicized them that the originality of his production is not affected.[1]

Jonson's second play in all probability was *The Case is Altered* of 1598-9. This comedy deals semi-romantically with another Plautian motive: a young lord's love for a supposed beggar's daughter (in reality of good lineage) and the recovery in a supposed substitute for a prisoner of war of a long lost son. But the intrigue is somewhat slender, interwoven as it is with a good deal of buffoonery, audience-baiting and literary satire, in which Antonio Balladino (A. Munday) is introduced ironically as 'in print for *the best plotter*'—a gibe at a critical indiscretion of Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*.

The three comedies that followed, *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), and *The Poetaster* (1601), are similarly more or less failures. In these plays Jonson's preoccupation with his theory of comedy, with his

[1] It is noteworthy that in the quarto or stage version of this play, dated 1601, the scene is laid in Italy and the names of the characters are nearly all Italian. In the folio of 1616 the scene is changed to England and the characters are all English. The acts and scenes are rearranged and some speeches altered: all to the manifest improvement of the comedy. The dates that follow in the text are those of production on the stage.

defiance of the public and with his literary enemies, exerted a disintegrating influence. They are as a whole badly constructed, and their characters approach more nearly to abstractions, to pure types than those of his first or of his later plays. The last two especially are comparatively colourless, and extremely and directly didactic. Yet the first three acts of *Cynthia's Revels* are admirably written and are more distinctly poetic than most of Jonson's work; while both plays contain delightful songs. The famous 'Queen and huntress, chaste and fair' occurs in the *Revels* (V. iii.).

In *Volpone*, acted at the Globe about December, 1605, Jonson produced his first masterpiece. It is perhaps the greatest of all his plays: in imaginative power it is certainly the first of all. Volpone is an epitome of wickedness, a highly intellectualized monster, hardly human, but with a horrible likeness to humanity. It is by far the most terrible of satiric comedies: a creation utterly unlike anything of Shakespeare's, yet intellectually almost as powerful and complete as anything of his.[1] The influence of his classical learning on Jonson is again apparent here. Perhaps he would have done better to place his Volpone and Mosca and Corvino in Imperial Rome rather than in seventeenth-century Venice.

*The Silent Woman* (1609) is of all Jonson's comedies the most farcical in theme, and of all his greater comedies it is the weakest in plot. It deals, like *Every Man in his Humour*, with follies, not crimes, and is on the whole the

[1] In all drama there can be very little that is finer than the magnificent opening passage of *Volpone* down to the entrance of the wretched creatures who minister to their master's malignant misanthropy. It reminds one a little of the opening speech of *The Jew of Malta*, but is far more weighty with thought and less dependent on mere sound.

most laughable of his works. It reminds one strongly of Molière; but even here the resemblance to the great and genial and light-handed French humorist is quite superficial.[1]

*The Alchemist* (1610), with *Volpone*, claims to be considered the greatest of all Jonson's plays. Its construction is certainly even less flawed than that of *Volpone*; its plausibility is greater, and its realism therefore more complete; its unity is perfect, in the sense that it is pure comedy from the excellent opening, which exposes the intimate relations of the three rogues round whom it centres, to the witty and admirable *dénoûment*. It is less of a poem than *Volpone*, less ideal in conception; its figures are viler and less horrible.[2]

*Bartholomew Fair* (1614) for vigour of execution, fertility of invention and richness of humour, may challenge comparison with either *Volpone* or *The Alchemist*. Here Jonson's satiric humour, running riot through a saturnalia of knavery, folly and cant, is less grim than in his two greatest plays. The conception is more farcical than serious, and the most serious part of the satire, that which deals with Puritanism, is no more than caricature. The play is brutally coarse; and just because it is more farcical and less fierce in spirit than *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*,

[1] The idea of Morose is taken from Libanius. The famous song, *Still to be neat*, in a translation from the Latin elegiacs commencing *Semper munditias* by an unknown disciple of Jean Bonnefons (1554-1614), an Auvergnat imitator of Catullus. The still more famous *Drink to me only*, which appears in the collection of poetical varieties called *The Forrest* (1616 folio), is a mosaic from the Greek of Philostratus.

[2] Coleridge declared that the plots of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *The Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones* were the most perfect that existed. It may be added that for pure construction *The Alchemist* equals the best work of Ibsen.

Jonson's lack of joy in his own humours is more strongly felt.

The latest of Jonson's greater plays was *The Staple of News* (1625). His wit and wisdom are here as much in evidence as ever, and there are in this play passages as weighty with thought and as dignified in their strength as almost anything he wrote earlier. Nevertheless the signs of the commencing decline are already very clearly visible, particularly in the absurd confusion of allegory and realism which is essential to the whole structure of this remarkable but very imperfect play. [1]

Jonson's two Roman tragedies, *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1611), belong to the class of dramas which are respected, but neither acted nor read. Their lack of colour, movement, and warmth is manifest. The defects of these tragedies may be summed up in the assertion that they are not tragic. They imply but do not display openly a profound classical reading, they contain passages of great weight and dignity, and *Sejanus* at least is finely constructed. [2]

Nor is it necessary to say much of the masques. The masque is a hybrid between poetry and pageantry which is long since dead, and which had little vitality at any time. The verse of Jonson's masques, divorced from its pageantry, is a maimed and incomplete thing, and to most people the reading of it is difficult. Yet Jonson's masques are by far the best things in this kind before Milton's *Comus*. The best of them have at times a noble gravity, at times a splendid richness of diction, and display a wonderful fer-

[1] Madrigal in this play stands for George Wither.

[2] The notes to *Sejanus* betray one cause of its lifelessness: Jonson's preoccupation with historical accuracy. On the other hand, no one need look at the notes—they make the play no worse than it is. It may be observed that the fall of such scoundrels as Jonson's Sejanus and Catiline could in any case hardly excite pity.

tility of fancy and invention. Their lyric passages and songs are frequently fine and graceful, but, like almost all Jonson's purely lyrical work, are curiously disfigured, execrable lines cropping up in the prettiest places. Never at any time did Jonson attain that perfection of lyrical manner in which form and sense are one and indivisible.[1]

Almost all Jonson's purely lyrical and epigrammatic work is included in the plays and in three collections: in the *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*, published in the folio of 1616, and in *Underwoods*, which appeared only in the folio of 1640. The songs contained in the plays are admirably designed for their purpose. They are ingenious and epigrammatic in character and fit excellently into their places. But neither they nor the poems in *The Forrest* (the 'choicest poems' down to 1616) and *Underwoods* (1640, 'lesser poems of later growth') show much of the true lyrical power.[2] They are pithy and witty, full of clever imagery, vigorously phrased, strongly individual, and though they reflect Jonson's classical reading they are unconventional. They lack grace, spontaneity, and music, and are almost invariably disfigured by faults of taste and by grossly bad lines. Either Jonson's ear was defective or his execution was curiously careless. Only momentarily do they attain to the perfection of phrasing demanded by lyric poetry. The

[1] The best of the masques are perhaps: *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), *Masque of Hymen* (1606), *The Hue and Cry after Cupid* (1608), and the splendid *Masque of Queens* (1609). Perhaps the witches in this last would be as good as they are without so much demonological learning; they could hardly be finer. The 'Dame' here is better than the Hecate of *Macbeth*. The *Masques* were collected by Henry Morley in the ninth volume of the *Carisbrooke Library*, 1890.

[2] Jonson's *English Grammar* and his version of *Horace his Art of Poetrie* also appeared in 1640.

following stanzas will serve as an example of Jonson's lyric verse:

'Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark, her forehead smoother
Than words that soothe her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
All the gain, all the good, of the elements' strife.

'Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow
Before the soil hath smutch'd it?
Have you felt the wool of the beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!'[1]

These verses are very fairly typical of Jonsonian lyric. They begin well, in spite of an ambiguity in the first two lines. The last five lines of the first stanza are extremely bad. 'Than words that soothe her' has no excuse but the necessity of rhyming, and how any man with an ear could have written such a line as 'Sheds itself

[1] This song occurs at the close of Wittipol's eloquent wooing of Mrs. Fitzdottrel in *The Devil is an Ass* (II. ii.), a cynical comedy of 1616. The roguery of the cozening 'projector,' Meercraft, the imbecile vanity, fatuous credulity and misplaced suspicion of the wretched gull, Fitzdottrel, supply Jonson with a congenial theme. Pug, an emissary of the Evil One, finds himself out-fiended by men—hence the title of a play, which in satirical force would probably rank as high as fourth or fifth in the Jonsonian series.

through the face' is incomprehensible. The concluding stanza is almost on Jonson's highest level; but the reference to such a very uncommon substance as 'nard' is characteristically inappropriate.

Aside from the main development of the drama in connexion with the London stage there flourished obscurely two other schools of dramatic production. One of these was born in the study of admiration of the classics, was academic and literary and anything rather than theatrical. The home of the other was at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The most noteworthy specimens of the former class are the tragedies of Samuel Daniel, Sir William Alexander, and Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. Sir W. Alexander (1567-1640), in 1633 created Earl of Stirling, published his four *Monarchicke Tragedies* in 1607.[1] They, like the tragedies of Daniel and Greville, are based chiefly on Seneca. They are empty, affected, and intolerably prolix. Fulke Greville (1554-1628), who was a member of Gabriel Harvey's Areopagus,[2] wrote two tragedies, *Mustapha* and

[1] *Darius* appeared in 1603, *Croesus* in 1604, *The Alexandræan, a Tragedy*, in 1605, and *Julius Caesar* in 1607. His *Workes*, including his love-sonnets entitled *Aurora* (1604) and his stupendous poem on *Doomesday* (1614), in eleven thousand lines, were issued in 1637, folio.

[2] A literary society having for its object the classicizing of English metres and literary forms. Greville had been a contributor to the poetical Miscellanies which crowned the verse of the sixteenth century. He was ennobled in 1620, and, eight years later, was stabbed by an old servant who had found he was not mentioned in his master's will. On his tomb at Warwick he is described with deliberate significance as 'servant to Queen Elizabeth, conceller to King James, frend to Sir Philip Sidney.' His noted *Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney*, first published in 1652, opens with a stately enumeration of his friend's qualities

*Alaham*, the former of which was surreptitiously published in 1609, the latter not till 1633. They are literary monstrosities, containing much serious and even profound political thought and no drama whatever. Lamb aptly remarked that they were rather political treatises than plays.

From the early years of Elizabeth's reign to about the year 1640 there were performed at Oxford and Cambridge 'tragedies, comedies, histories, pastorals and shows, publicly acted, in which the graduates of good place and reputation' were 'specially parted.'[1] Many were written by members of the Universities, either in Latin or English; but English plays at the Universities were an innovation and encountered serious opposition. In 1604 James I. forbade the performance of any play in English within five miles of Cambridge. The University drama appears to have been usually either satirical or allegorical, or both. The most celebrated of the plays in Latin is *Ignoramus*, a satire on pettifogging lawyers and their barbarous jargon, written by George Ruggle (1575-1622), fellow of Clare Hall, and performed in the hall of Trinity before James I. in March, 1615. The King was very pleased with it, and it was produced again before him in the following May (1615).[2]

and virtues. But its tone is monotonous and it lacks the quaint beauties of Walton. His *Learned and Elegant Workes* appeared in a thin folio in 1633, five years after his death. (For his sonnet-cycle, *Carlica*, see Book I., vol. i., 9, 21; cf. M. F. Crow, *Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles*, 1898.)

[1] Thomas Heywood.

[2] Its plot is taken from an Italian comedy by Porta, based on the *Pseudolus* of Plautus. It was printed in 1630, translated in 1662, and elaborately edited in 1787 by John Sidney Hawkins. The common law was defended against *Ignoramus* by the Lincoln's Inn caricaturist, John Stephens, and others.

Other Latin plays of considerable fame, but of an earlier generation, were the *Dido* of William Gager, a Westminster and Christ Church man (B.A. 1577), which was presented in magnificent

Of the English University plays the most interesting are *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1599) and *The Return from Parnassus* (2 parts, 1601-2; pt. ii., 1606, 4to). These form a trilogy. In the *Pilgrimage*, Philomusus and Studioso travel with difficulty through the land of Logic, the land of Rhetoric and the land of Philosophy, to Parnassus. In the *Return* they appear as vainly endeavouring to make a living with the acquirements they have painfully earned. Incidentally a number of contemporary University poets and dramatists are criticized or satirized, and the actor Kemp, one of the personages of the *Return* (second part) is made to remark: 'Here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down, aye and Ben Jonson too.' These plays are not serious literature, but they are curious, ingenious, and interesting. Who wrote them is not known. They have been ascribed, with small likelihood, to John Day. They were performed at St. John's, Cambridge.[1]

style in the hall of Christ Church, in 1583, before the Prince Palatine of Poland, Albertus de Alasco (Gager also wrote a Latin tragedy called *Meleager*, 1581, and *Ulysses Redux*, 1592), and the stiff and lifeless Senecan tragedy, much noted in its day, *Roxana*, which was given at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1591-2, and twice printed in 1632. The author of *Roxana* was William Alabaster (1567-1640), a Westminster and Trinity man, who suffered the Tower, like Constable, for his Catholic opinions, but reverted to Protestantism, became a prebendary of St. Paul's, wrote some extraordinary treatises of cabalistic divinity, and published in his extreme old age his learned *Lexicon Pentaglotton, Hebraicum, Chaldaicum, Syriacum, Talmudico-Rabbinicon et Arabicum*, 1637, folio.

[1] Among other University plays produced like *Ignoramus* before James I. on his visit to Cambridge in 1615 may be noted Phineas Fletcher's *Sicelides* (published 1631), a piscatorial, and the comedy of *Albumazar* by Thomas Tomkis, founded on Porta's *L'Astrologo*. The *Technogamia*, a fossilized morality, or allegorical piece, acted before James I. at Woodstock, 26 Aug. 1621, was written by Barten Holyday (d. 1661), afterwards Archdeacon of Oxford.

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